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LITERARY TYPES

BEING

ESSAYS IN CRITICISM

BY

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F. R. HIST. SOC.

"We cannot look, however imperfectly, upon a great man without gaining something from him."—*Carlyle.*

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PREFACE

I HAVE applied the title of "Literary Types" to the following essays in criticism, because each writer that I have treated of seems to me to develop a particular phase in literary history.

Landor I have termed "Dramatist," not because he wrote one or two plays, but because all the literary work he did was essentially dramatic in intention and execution.

I have appended the epithet of "Man of Letters" to De Quincey for the reason that no narrower term seems able to adequately express his compass or versatility.

The words "Essayist," "Philosopher," and "Novelist," apply naturally, without need of any explanation here, to Lamb, Carlyle, and Dickens.

A word is, perhaps, necessary to explain why I have set down the name "Poet" as an epithet distinctive of Coleridge, considering what I have said of him in the following pages. I have done so because he not only was a pre-eminent poet,

but because this is the title by which he is best known. It is a fact, however, that he can be included in so many other realms of thought that this title is hardly sufficient to describe his claim as a great man; but if not a perfectly logical definition, it is at least sufficient to distinguish him from the others who here bear him company.

The great men I have here essayed to study appear to me to have all had some higher aim than the mere desire for literary fame, for they all seem to hold with Marmontel that, "Le plus digne objet de la littérature, le seul même qui l'ennoblesse et qui l'honore, c'est son utilité morale;" nor are they that sort of men who sometimes, as Montaigne quaintly has it, "expect to derive reputation and applause from little knacks and frivolous subtleties."

In what I have said in criticism I have endeavoured not to be unduly partial, and as the opinions I have ventilated have been inspired by something more than a mere passing admiration for the works of the great men I have written of, I trust that I shall not be accused of the opposite fault of being, as Landor terms it, "a hasty observer or a cold chronologist."

E. B. C.

ORCHARDENE,
BEDFORD PARK, W.

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To

MY WIFE.

LITERARY TYPES.

Thomas De Quincey,

MAN OF LETTERS.

"He alone is worthy of respect who knows what is of use to himself and others, and who labours to control his self-will."—*Goethe.*

De Quincey's personality is at once the most extraordinary and the vaguest of any in the world of English letters. He comes before us in his works more distinctly than any other writer; he is, as it were, always present, and yet he is so shadowy, so misunderstood, that he seems to be at once the medium and the spirit of his own literature. The reason is less obvious than it would appear at first sight. To say that he is too near us, that we should get more distance on him, that we ought to draw back and have the whole of his work and character within the compass of our vision, is to

use but empty phrases, mere commonplaces of criticism; others are nearer than he, and others are better known; they have no more distance on them, and yet we understand them more accurately. Neither is it that he is so overwhelmingly great, although in this respect he is sufficiently formidable, and his light will shine brightly though fitfully when greater blazes have died out. What we see of him is so fragmentary and so inconclusive that he may not inaptly be termed the Will-o'-the-wisp of literature. Doubtless it is well, as Goethe once said, "If we want to understand and enjoy the whole, that we should see it in its smallest parts;" but then we must be allowed, if we would accurately estimate its value, to complete our investigations by viewing the object afterwards *as* a whole; and it is this that forms our chief difficulty when we would adequately comprehend the life and character of the "English Opium-eater."

Our materials are not inconsiderable, for, putting aside the recognised Autobiography, which in itself fills two volumes of Professor Masson's final edition,[1] we have the man himself in all kinds of reviews and essays, of his own and other men's

[1] Besides this edition, which runs to fourteen volumes, Mr. Hogg has edited two volumes of hitherto uncollected writings of De Quincey's

writing; we have, moreover, Mr. Masson's monograph and Mr. Page's "Life," both authoritative from the fact that both writers were intimate with De Quincey, and both interesting and instructive from the personal abilities of the authors. So that what is to be gleaned from facts and dates is easily procurable, and were these all that is wanted, we should not be unduly prepared to make the journey into the unknown regions of De Quincey's life and work; but this is not all that constitutes the necessary apparatus for setting out on the voyage of discovery of a man's character and personality.

Autobiography is always the most untrustworthy source to which we can go; in fact, there is hardly on record an autobiographical account of a man's life which can be at all reckoned as wholly accurate; and apart from the works of art they produced, Goethe and Cellini have done their worst in this respect. A man may write down nothing that is untrue of his own life, indeed what he does set down, if he follows truth sedulously, will be more accurate than a mere biography could well be, but he will almost inevitably suppress much that, were it known, would materially alter our opinion of the man and our estimate of his character.[1] Auto-

[1] The writer does not mean these words to apply to that extraordinary literary curiosity, the Autobiography of Marie

biographies are, too, in another respect, misleading, for there is in them such a glamour of truth noticeable throughout that it is doubly difficult—even putting aside what is suppressed—to estimate what credence one should give to what is set down.

It is therefore rather to what has been written about him than to what he has written about himself that the student of De Quincey's life must go, if he would gain an accurate knowledge of the actions and works of this great writer.

From his birth, in 1785, till the year 1803, in which he went to Oxford, his life was a succession of restless wanderings; throughout his career it ceased to be little else, nor with such a temperament could it have failed to be. Changes of school, a tour in Ireland, excursions into Wales, and vagrancy in London; all these different aspects of life, not unaccompanied by adventures more or less dramatically hit off in the Autobiography, gave a colour to his imagination and a force to his independence which is generally the result of an early encounter with the world under all kinds of varied circumstances.

But as it is with De Quincey's works rather than with himself, so far, of course, as the two can be

Bashkirtseff, a replica almost of the memoirs (written by herself) of the "grand Mademoiselle," cousin to Louis XIV.

separated from one another, that we here have more particularly to do, a quiet desultory glance through his actions is only what is necessary, and is all that will be attempted.

His father was a cultivated merchant,[1] travelling much abroad, as was necessitated by the exigencies of his profession, and for the same reason, making prolonged stays in foreign countries; his mother, if not exactly literary, was, at least, an intelligent woman, perhaps to be reckoned intellectual. So much misapprehension arises from the hasty designation of a woman as literary, that it seems almost necessary to be particular about the precise adjective used. Whatever her higher gifts may have been, she appears to have been lovable, wise, and sensible, and the life at Greenhay, De Quincey's early home, seems to have gone on sufficiently smoothly until the day on which the elder De Quincey returned home somewhat suddenly to die; then all was hushed and still, and it was Thomas who was selected to sit by the couch of his dying father, as his quiet manners and gentle voice were peculiarly suited to the sick chamber.

[1] He may probably be considered as literary since he wrote a book—an account of a tour he made in the Midland Counties, in 1772, which was published three years later. It forms an 8vo volume of 108 pages.

First a tutor, the Rev. Mr. Samuel Hall, then Bath Grammar School, and later a private seminary at Winkfield in Wiltshire, were the educational centres which prepared the way for Oxford. At all of them he surprised by his eccentricity and astonished by his aptitude.

The anticipation of Oxford fills him with a grave sort of excitement, and we find him at first determining to enter his name on the books of Christ Church, but this resolution, through unforeseen circumstances, had eventually to be cancelled, and he became an undergraduate at Worcester College.[1] Of his life here very little is known; he is remembered chiefly as a quiet, studious man, much frequenting the society of a certain German named Schwartzburg, whose influence and society may have given the bias to his mind which induced him to study so fully the literature of the Fatherland. But the most noticeable fact of his academic career was the first use of that opium which was destined to become so indissolubly connected with his name. An internal disorder which had eluded all attempts made to cure it, and which

[1] His bust in marble, a replica of the one by Sir John Steell, R.S.A., belonging to John Ritchie Findlay, Esq., now forms one of the interesting objects in the dining-hall of that college.

threatened to become chronic, was De Quincey's reason for taking the drug in 1804, and what was primarily used for the alleviation of pain was continued in response to, for a time at least, an unconquerable craving. He has left us, in the shape of his "Confessions" of the phantasmagoria produced by the fascinating narcotic, one of the most extraordinary classics in the English language.

"The Confessions of an English Opium-eater" first appeared in book form in 1822 (the enlarged edition following so late as 1856). It had come out in the previous year under the wing of the *London Magazine*, in the form of three separate articles, and, as was anticipated, had attracted something more than a passing notice, no less from the strange *bizarrerie* of the contents, than from the anonymous position assumed by their author.

Seldom, indeed, if ever, have the sensations been so minutely analysed or so graphically described. In this work De Quincey appears as a kind of spiritualised Rousseau, and the indescribable charm which he could throw over everything he touched gave to his "Confessions" an interest which, when added to the strange nature of the work, became quite vital and absorbing.

In a thousand ways De Quincey rivets our attention; the charm of style which is here is

common to all his productions, but in this book the unique nature of the matter gives it a more than ordinary significance. No other writer can talk in so easy and conversational a way, more clearly demonstrate the most abstract propositions, or clothe, on occasion, his thoughts in more oriental imagery. If he has a fault, it is that he is too diffuse, but this which appears so marked in the autobiography is subordinated or else introduced so skilfully in the "Confessions" that its presence is in no part felt to be a drawback. Whether he is enunciating some abstract truth, as that, "the dread book of account which the Scriptures speak of is, in fact, the mind itself of each individual," or whether he is tracing the sudden development and change in his visions and their causes, as when he shows that the study of Livy, and a minute acquaintance with the times of Charles I. produced a vision in which the beautiful ladies dancing at the court of the Stuart monarch suddenly gave place to the "heart-quaking sound of *Consul Romanus*," he is equally felicitous and equally elaborate. For applying apt quotations, and for introducing fitting poetical commentary, he has as perfect an aptitude as Charles Lamb himself.

The book is characterised throughout by that eloquence and thorough knowledge and grasp of

the subject which is the hall-mark of all De Quincey's work; he never loses by breadth of treatment what he possesses in depth of insight, and it is his wide, nay, almost universal knowledge, coupled with the sound and thorough way in which he applies it, that makes him so perfect a writer and so trustworthy an authority. De Quincey's method proves, as has been said of the eighteenth century essayists, that "'Tis possible to be eloquent without adjectives, and elegant without affectation; that to be brilliant you need not necessarily be extravagant and conceited; that without being maudlin and sentimental it is not beyond mortal capacity to be pathetic." [1]

Had the personality of its writer been a less assertive one, the "Confessions" would still have been a very curious and valuable work.

De Quincey used not only to highly elaborate his original work, but to, as it were, embroider it by numerous smaller additions in the shape of short stories or dissertations. It is by no means a unique attribute. It has certain advantages, but, at the same time, it is apt to puzzle and bewilder, and can hardly be said to fix the mind as a continuous narrative would not fail to do.

In the curiously oriental tale entitled "The

[1] W. E. Henley in *Views and Reviews*.

Daughter of Lebanon," De Quincey had intended further to illustrate and amplify the "Confessions" in this way; the conclusion, however, having been accidentally burnt or otherwise destroyed, this story, which may be regarded, says Professor Masson, "as a visionary transfiguration of that poor Anne of Oxford Street, who is in a sort the central personage of the 'Confessions,'" was placed by De Quincey deliberately at their close as a kind of not irrelevant sequel. There is, however, a want of cohesion which greatly militates against the success of this plan, and what he succeeded in doing with another piece, "Suspiria de Profundis," he has hardly been able to achieve with the "Daughter of Lebanon."[1]

A still more appropriate sequel to the "Confessions" was, however, found in "Suspiria de Profundis."

The "Suspiria" is divided into six sections, entitled respectively, "Dreaming," "The Palimpsest of the Human Brain," "The Vision of Life," "Memorial Suspiria," "Savannah-la-Mar," and "Levassa and our Ladies of Sorrow." It is em-

[1] The wonderful piece of word-painting called "The English Mail-coach" was originally intended to have formed part of the same collection, an idea which was eventually abandoned.

bellished by all the gorgeous word-painting and glorious allegorical imagery which give such a distinctive character to the "Confessions." "The object of that work was to reveal something of the grandeur which belongs potentially to human dreams," says its author. The "Suspiria" would seem to have the intention of giving the clench to the argument so ably formulated in the earlier work. "Levassa and our Ladies of Sorrow," a particularly beautiful symbol or dream-legend, helped, to use De Quincey's own words, to rehearse or prefigure the course of the "Confessions"; and by internal evidence in his works, he seems to have attached a particular value to this mythological conception.

If the publication of the "Confessions" and the "Suspiria de Profundis" astonished the reading public, the articles which their author some time after wrote, with the strange-sounding title, "Murder considered as One of the Fine Arts," may be said to have still further startled that public by the nature of their subject, no less than by the peculiar breadth of their treatment. It showed to the world a humorist with a pen as trenchant and an irony as bitter as ever Swift possessed. In a rapid sketch, De Quincey gives a *résumé* of some celebrated cases of murder, and of the distinctive

features of their perpetration, and then goes, with the elaborate detail which he alone had at command, into the cases of the Williams and M'Kean murders. He touches lightly on the fearful Burke and Hare crimes, which at one time spread terror throughout the land, and he gives an amusing account of a dinner given by the so-called Dilettante Murderers. Who is not familiar with that most exacting of amateurs "Toad-in-the-Hole"? But the height of terrific detail is reached in the description of the baker creeping downstairs, and seeing the villain Williams at his horrible work; when, paralysed with unspeakable terror, the wretched man can neither shriek out, run to his companion's help, or fly, even when a turn of the murderer's shoulder would have exposed another victim to his sight. As the author himself says, "The situation was tremendous, beyond any that is on record."

We may imagine what a harrowing supplementary chapter De Quincey would have added to what he had already written had the atrocious Wainewright perpetrated his crimes at an earlier date; nothing in the annals of criminals could so have appealed to a proper sense of the fine arts in this direction, and, indeed, later (in 1848), in an article on Charles Lamb, De Quincey devotes some pages

to the soi-distant *littérateur* and erstwhile profligate and poisoner, the brilliant Janus Weathercock, with whom the gentle Elia was so favourably prepossessed.

The connection with the *London Magazine*, which commenced in 1821 with the "Confessions," was in every way a profitable undertaking; with the exception, however, of an exceedingly able paper on the writings of Jean Paul Friedrich Richter, together with a translated specimen of his work, followed later by the "Analects" from Richter, De Quincey allowed more than a year to elapse before he put forth anything more in its pages; but such had been the success of his original venture, that the proprietors of the *Magazine* were only too glad to take any contribution he chose to send them under his original *nom-de-plume* of "The English Opium-eater," and in 1823, a renewed activity on De Quincey's part gave them the opportunity. In the beginning of that year appeared the first of the "Letters to a Young Man whose Education has been neglected," a series of epistles which was continued with but a single break till the following June. The letters are in all respects admirable, alike in their penetrating and acute criticisms on literature as well as for the large views and original suggestions in the matter

of general education. They have, as well, an amusing connection, for Lamb, a friend of, and fellow contributor with De Quincey, was so struck by what seemed to him the whimsical title of the letters, that he wrote a parody on them, entitled "Letters to an Old Gentleman whose Education has been neglected," which likewise appeared in the *London Magazine* of January, 1825, and are now to be found collected in "Eliana."

The "Letters" were followed by "Notes from the Pocket-book of a late Opium-eater," under which general heading, "Walking Stewart," "Malthus," "English Dictionaries," etc., had a place; a notice of Herder, under the title, "The Death of a German Great Man," had appeared in the April number, and filled up the gap caused by the temporary discontinuance of the "Letters to a Young Man."

In the following year, the "Inquiry into the Origin of the Rosicrucians," and other papers, led up to the more important article on Goethe, in which De Quincey attempted to obscure the fame of the greatest of literary Germans, and to sully the reputation of his young translator, for the paper was provoked by Carlyle's version of "Wilhelm Meister." Personally friendly to Carlyle, as he has owned himself, the critique was

a singularly ill-timed obstruction to one entering on the path of literary life, but for us its main interest lies in the attempt to traduce Goethe, and to blacken the intentions of the man and the tendency of his works.

In what he calls the "Gallery of Female Portraits," De Quincey examines each of the women who figure in the novel, and finds them all frail and faulty; and from this argument he enunciates the grossly irrelevant conclusion that the "Wilhelm Meister" is the most objectionable of books, and its author the most immoral of men.

It would be strange if, in the course of a long review, even when that review is unfriendly, a man like De Quincey did not find much to say that is both original and true. At the same time, our regard for the writer must not induce us to overlook the fact that there is also much in it that is mistaken and misleading.

It will be long before the English reading public will be able to rightly estimate the debt they owe to De Quincey in opening up the hitherto sealed book of German literature. In this direction his fame has become somewhat obscured by what Carlyle has more recently done in the same direction. The difference in the methods of the two men is striking. Carlyle wrote on German litera-

ture, and translated German writers as we should expect a German who had been most accurately trained in our tongue, to do. De Quincey, on the other hand, with an equal degree of knowledge, and a similar love for his subject, wrote like an Englishman who had been profoundly impressed by the beauties which he found in the Teutonic literature. Carlyle seemed to work in this field because he was overwhelmed by the ignorance of the English people in this respect, De Quincey because he was impressed by the charm of the literature itself.

With the publication of articles on "Kant's Idea of a Universal History," on the "Falsification of English History," and on a German novel, "Walladmor," a soi-distant production of the author of "Waverley," De Quincey's connection with the *London Magazine* seems to have suddenly terminated, and after some wanderings between London and Westmoreland, he got, through the influence of Wilson, the Christopher North of the "Noctes," a post on the staff of *Blackwood's Magazine*. In this periodical he made his first appearance with an article on "Lessing's Laocoon," which was followed by "The Last Days of Immanuel Kant," the famous essay on "Murder," the "Toilette of a Hebrew Lady," another essay on Kant, and his "Miscellaneous Essays."

The "Toilette of a Hebrew Lady," a curious attempt to bring one phase of the *vie-intime* of those far distant times within the ken of present mental perception, illustrates at once the intimate knowledge of the subject which De Quincey possessed, as well as his graphic power of reproducing the reflex of that knowledge before our eyes. From the close acquaintance he shows with the usages and details of the costume of that period, we might believe that we were reading a transcript that had come down to us from a thousand years.

In his treatment of Kant he is at once perfectly at home, and judiciously critical. He liked his subject (to say he understood it would be but to publish the secret of success of all his writings), and he wrote thoroughly and well on it. He cannot conceive how Kant should ever fail to interest the world. "To suppose a reader thoroughly indifferent to Kant," he says, "is to suppose him thoroughly unintellectual." "Peace be to his dust," are his concluding words, "and to his memory everlasting honour."

From a careful study of his works, we shall find that the power of criticism was developed in De Quincey in a greater degree than is usually the case with men of purely original genius; and if he seems so "grossly irrelevant" in his estimate of

"Wilhelm Meister," and so particularly biassed in his admiration for Kant, we may be quite certain that what he says on both these subjects, adverse or otherwise, arose only after a thorough weighing of the evidence on both sides, which left him perfectly satisfied that what he wrote was only what was just and true, and did not originate, as is so often the case with critics, from any personal animosity on the one hand, or any idea of irrelevant *réclame* on the other.[1] It is this thorough straightforwardness and singleness of purpose in his writings which makes his recollections of contemporary writers at once so interesting and so valuable.

It was in 1807 that he first met Coleridge, "Metaphysician, Logician, Bard," as Lamb calls him, and by the profundity and range of the poet's talk, De Quincey was astonished and delighted beyond all his previous expectations. What we learn from his writings on Coleridge, we are also told by his biographer that "his veneration became a kind of filial affection," and the "God-like forehead" of Coleridge, as Wordsworth called it, seemed to De Quincey to belong to a God. Anyone who has read the chapter on Coleridge in the Autobiography,

[1] We must not, however, assume that because a man, however great, believes his own judgment to be correct, that it is necessarily correct.

or the paper on "Coleridge and Opium-eating," will not need to be told of the awe and reverence with which he regarded the author of "Kubla Khan." "This astonishing man, be it again remembered," he says, "besides being an exquisite poet, a profound political speculator, a philosophic student of literature through all its chambers and recesses, was also a circumnavigator on the most pathless waters of scholasticism and metaphysics."

With what different feelings he first encountered Wordsworth is observable in his paper on the Lake Poets (erroneously so called). He had perhaps anticipated too much; he had prefigured, as he himself tells us, an image which should crush his faculties as before Elijah or St. Paul. This was, indeed, but a commentary on his feelings for the poet, which, if always informed with awe, were never really sustained by veneration or love. The harshness which so often characterised Wordsworth's demeanour, brought about the gradual estrangement of which De Quincey has left a written record. "Men of extraordinary genius and force of mind," he concludes, "are far better as objects for distant admiration than as daily companions," and it was for this very reason that what had primarily caused him to anticipate so much enjoyment from the companionship of a great man

was in reality the very reason for that feeling of despondency and unrest which he experienced on his return to the lakes.

In his connection with another literary man, De Quincey was more fortunate, and in the peaceful good-humour and unselfish lovableness of the gentle Elia, he found himself at once in the genial element which Lamb seems to have invariably spread around himself. "Amongst the earliest literary acquaintances I made was that of the inimitable Charles Lamb; inimitable I say, but the word is too limited in its meaning," thus did De Quincey in 1838 speak of the most exquisite of essayists and best of men.

With Southey he was on equally good terms, for he equally understood the innate goodness of the man, his thorough kindliness and love, which "the air of distance and reserve" about him was quite unable to shake or dispel. While allowing that this reserve was perhaps a little too freezing, he detects in it the elements of a "lofty self-respecting mind." How lovingly too he notes the incessant toil and unwearied method to which Southey subjected himself, and which has left him the most industrious of literary men on record.

With a knowledge of the greatest of its inhabitants, De Quincey combined a love for the Lake

District itself, which peeps out in all kinds of affectionate recollections or passing notices; and his paper on the dialect of that part of the country which he contributed to the columns of the *Westmoreland Gazette* (he had previously offered it to Wordsworth for insertion in his "Guide to the Lakes," and it had been refused), shows how thoroughly he had made himself acquainted with this phase of its social life, and in the "Confessions" he tells how that little mountainous district had for him "a secret fascination, subtle, sweet, fantastic, and even from (his) seventh or eighth year spiritually strong."

It is difficult, notwithstanding these words, to estimate adequately what effect the scenery and manifold associations of this beautiful country had on De Quincey. That it was in no way inconsiderable is very obvious; for what had left so palpable a mark on the mental visions of Wordsworth and Southey would hardly fail to touch deeply the sensibilities of one whose mind was equally impressionable to all such influences.

To notice what results De Quincey has achieved in the purely imaginative portion of his writings is rather to develop our knowledge of another side of his literary character than to open up any particular interest in the productions themselves.

Of the chief of them, "Klosterheim," the plot and machinery are sufficiently extraordinary, but they have, at the same time, with all their exaggerated surroundings, a force and vigour which, if not of much consequence when compared with what Scott has left us, yet show an amount of facility in this mode of writing which is in itself another sign of the wonderful versatility which its author possessed.

"Klosterheim," as does all De Quincey's work, shows remarkable care in its style, and what Professor Masson calls "a marble beauty of sentence" attracts our attention and appeals rather to our intellectual faculties than to our more cursory interest in a work of fiction. Of his tales and novelettes, "The Incognito" and "The King of Hayti" are full of clever humour. "The Dice: a Tale of Black Art and Witchcraft," "The Fatal Marksman," which has some not remote resemblance to "The Dice," seems, with that tale, to have had its origin in the German; but "The Avenger," a strange fantastic story of secret murder, quite after its author's own heart, is as original as it is bizarre.

"The Spanish Military Nun," founded on a historical basis, is in De Quincey's best manner; the happy mixture of mirth and earnestness which he had so well at command makes it a tale which,

as has been remarked, has all the fascination of one of the best of the picaroon romances of Spain.[1]

De Quincey seems to have left no branch of literature untouched by the power of his treatment or the beauty of his style. Whether he is examining the labour of others, as in his criticisms on Schiller, Goethe, Lessing, Kant, and Landor; whether he is formulating theories of criticism or style, as in his papers on rhetoric, and his "Letters to a Young Man;" whether he is writing biography or disentangling history; whether he is immersed in the depths of political economy, or raised up to the altitudes of speculative philosophy and latter-day theology, he is equally at home; and the success with which he has brought to bear his universal knowledge on every subject he has handled is only equalled by the grace and tact with which he has touched and ornamented them all.

As we commenced by observing, few men have had their personal character so reflected in their works as De Quincey. The same thought has been suggested in the case of Landor, but here it is evident in a much greater degree, and "the multi-

[1] At a moment when most English romances gave the idea that they were translated from the German, and badly translated, this is good praise.

fariousness of his matter is, in fact, but a manifestation of that peculiar personal character which chanced in his case to be brought into the business of literature." Setting out with a mind endowed with an unusual degree of receptivity, he enhanced its vigour and added to its capabilities by a course of extensive reading in every branch of knowledge which is almost without its parallel. It is not, therefore, surprising that we find an American reviewer marvelling at his "exquisite refinement of mind, the subtleness of association, and the extreme tenuity of the threads of thought, the gossamer filaments yet finally wearing themselves together, and thickening imperceptibly into a strong and expanded web."

In himself he combined the attributes of several individuals; but this led to what is his chief fault (there are those who consider it his greatest charm), discursiveness, and with a mind endowed with peculiar analytical power and an inventive genius no less vigorous, he often so far allowed himself to be carried beyond the pale of his subject and permitted the subsidiary element to overwhelm the primary motive, that some readers find no little difficulty in following him. But if his path makes so many detours, they are *only* detours, and always come round, although, perchance, after

many windings, to the original destination he had in view at starting.

If an analogy may be instituted between writers and musicians, we should style De Quincey the Mendelssohn of letters, for he strikes us as having the same perfect command of his subject, the same remarkable versatility, the same wonderful technique as the great composer; a command, versatility and technique which have given to Mendelssohn the reputation of being the most perfectly cultured of all musical exponents.[1]

De Quincey's personal appearance has been often described, and, as is not frequently the case with such pen-portraitures, these descriptions tally with one another in a very satisfactory degree. Caricature, in writing as well as in drawing, gives us often a better idea of the subject than we should get by a more faithful delineation, and in this respect the "Papaverius" of Burton's "Book Hunter" is an undying portraiture of our author. In this description we note the attenuated figure, relieved in a remarkable degree by the wonderful expression of the face with its broad and high forehead, the cheeks crimsoned by a bloom, at first

[1] "De Quincey's style is superb, his powers of reasoning unsurpassed, his imagination is warm and brilliant, and his humour both masculine and delicate," said the *Quarterly Review*.

sight suggestive of youth, but by nearer scrutiny found to be the result of "countless little wrinkles which engrained his skin, gathering thickly round the curiously expressive and subtle lips," but which could be more remotely traced to the use of opium. Other personal recollections dwell upon the strange, misty dark eyes with their dilated iris, curiously belieing the powerful sight which remained intact till De Quincey's death.

A short man, for he did not stand more than 5 feet 3 or 4 inches, yet in this "strangely fragile, unsubstantial and puerile figure" resided one of the most potent and original spirits that ever frequented a tenement of clay.

In his manner, he curiously combined the eccentricity usually associated with genius and the kindness and urbanity of a highly polished nature.[1] "No one who ever met De Quincey could fail to be struck, even after the briefest intercourse, with the extreme sweetness and courtesy of his

[1] Professor Wilson has not infelicitously caught De Quincey's conversational manner in the 23rd of the "Noctes," and the "Shepherd" is made to describe the "Opium-eater" by the two words, urbanity and amenity, "meaning by the first," as he says, "that soft bricht polish that a man gets by leevin' among gentlemen scholars in towns and cities, and by the ither, a peculiar sweetness, amaist like that o' a woman, yet sae far frae bein' feminine, as masculine as that o' Allan Ramsay's ain 'Gentle Shepherd.'"

manners," says Mr. Findlay in his "Personal Recollections" of the writer.

His conversation must have been of that exquisite kind which consists in possessing, in an equal degree, the rare power of listening patiently, and of talking well. He did not dogmatise like Johnson, or monopolise time and attention like Macaulay. He was not always preaching like Coleridge, or punning like Lamb. Never rising to declamation, or descending to tragic diminuendo, his talk seems to have flown on in a gentle ripple, teeming with apt metaphor, loaded with apposite illustration, full of learning and genius, but so simple and direct that only the clever knew how learned it was, and even the dull confessed it pleasing. As it has been expressed, "When he ended he did not seem to pause so much as to perorate."

The position which De Quincey holds in the literature of this land is a high and an assured one, but it is probable that for the general public he will be admired without being thoroughly understood. He is too apt to make us dissatisfied with our own knowledge by unconsciously bringing forward so many evidences of his own vast learning.

It is for this reason that his true worth will

only be adequately recognised by the esoteric audience which such a man cannot fail to gather round him; by it he will be fully appreciated, because the nearer one approaches De Quincey, the greater will be one's admiration, and the stronger one's love.

Charles Lamb,

ESSAYIST.

"Beloved beyond all names of English birth,
More dear than mightier memories; gentlest name
That ever clothed itself with flower-sweet fame,
Or linked itself with loftiest names of old
By right and might of loving; I, that am
Less than the least of those within thy fold,
Give only thanks for them to thee, Charles Lamb."

—*Swinburne.*

In the whole range of English literature we shall hardly find a single writer who, with so little apparent effort, charms us so much as Charles Lamb. De Quincey may be more elaborate, Macaulay more grandiose, Leigh Hunt more polished, and Landor more "marmoreally emphatic," but none can stir our intellect more than the gentle Elia, and none can so surely touch our hearts. It is now over a hundred years ago since he first saw the light. "I was born, and passed the first seven years of my life in the Temple. Its church, its halls, its garden, its fountain, its river I had almost said, for in those young years, what was this king of rivers to me but a stream that

watered our pleasant places? These are my oldest recollections." It is over a hundred years, we say, and yet his memory is as green, and our love for him as tender as if he belonged to our own time. We speak of him as we should of some dear friend who was, indeed, lost to us, but who, when living, had done us all individually some kind action, who had continually raised some laugh of merriment, or alleviated some sigh of grief. This tender feeling of regard which he inspires chiefly arises from the charm and simplicity with which he communicates his thoughts, and in a lesser degree from the semi-autobiographical garb in which they are clothed. We say advisedly "in a lesser degree," for these autobiographical notices, beginning with the passage we have quoted, and running almost continuously throughout all the essays, have a literary, but hardly a true, historical value; undoubtedly, the personal element forms so large a proportion of them that an interesting biography might alone be compiled from these materials; but Lamb so modified and transformed his experiences in order to produce a good artistic effect, that it is a somewhat difficult matter to properly discriminate between what may be received as true and what discarded as false. But apart from this regular

autobiographical aspect, few men's lives have been so accurately reflected in their works as that of the kindly essayist whose days were o'ershadowed by the burden of as great a sorrow as man can be destined to bear.

If we are ready to acknowledge that too full an indulgence in sorrow is often selfishness, and that too much grief has in it a spirit of irreverence, then we shall be more able to properly estimate the true worth of Lamb's private life. There is always a flavour of melancholy running, sometimes, it is true, well-nigh imperceptibly, through his writings, but it is a melancholy so tempered by sweetness and humour that we hardly realise it ourselves, and we feel that its presence was almost unconsciously the outcome of its author's inmost feelings.

We hear a good deal of Lamb's levity of manner, and of his turning whatever was suggested by conversation into quips and jests. But when we know his story, his life of noble unselfishness, his more than fraternal love, we shall find something pathetic in these little innocent attempts to stifle remembrance or to obliterate the ever-present sorrow. We shall certainly not agree with Carlyle, who, more than once, found fault with Lamb for his misplaced levity and irreverent jests, as being an ill example to younger men, who had to live

their lives in a world that was altogether serious. But the sage of Chelsea was not always fair in his judgment. The young men he speaks of must have been singularly wicked young men if the harmless jokes of the gentle essayist created a disturbance in their feeble minds; a very dangerously combustible young man forsooth, who would be hastened away into nether darkness by the innocent facetiæ of Elia! Such a young man, indeed, as we hope never existed outside the atrabiliar mind of Carlyle himself.

There was, too, another reason for what seemed to many of Lamb's intimate friends ill-timed jesting. Like many constitutionally nervous people, he had a way, particularly in the presence of strangers, of trying to disguise his real feelings concerning any topic that might turn up in conversation, by making jests upon it, and oftener by directly attempting to lead away the talk to alien subjects of a frivolous nature. In fact, this phase of his character was rather the outcome of an infirmity than of a fault. Very unfortunately, so much has been written about Lamb by people who had seen him under these disadvantageous circumstances,[1] that to those who had not studied his

[1] "Often as his sportive sallies seemed to border on what appeared irreverent, and to some rigid people the verge of

mind more deeply, these little idiosyncrasies appeared to reveal the real nature of the man, whereas they were in reality a form of nervous eccentricity, brought about by certain circumstances acting too forcibly on a particularly nervous temperament. It was this tendency that moved him to delight in innocently perverting the real incidents he writes on, in his Essays and elsewhere, and Canon Ainger has recorded how, "There was a certain waywardness or love of practical joking in Charles Lamb that led him often to treat matters of fact with deliberate falsification." As an illustration of this eccentricity as it affected him in his relations with his friends, the immortal story of the "Comptroller of Stamps," will be remembered; for an example of how it occurs in his writings let the curious read that delightful bit of literary fooling, called "Postscript to the Chapter on 'Ears,'" which is included in "Eliana."

It was of no small advantage to the poor honest household of the Lambs when Charles obtained, through the kind offices of a gentleman by name of Yeates, a presentation to Christ's Hospital. He remained a Blue-coat Boy from 1782 till 1789.

profanity, I am disposed to acquit him of all *intentional* offence of that kind," says the Quaker Barton in a letter to a friend.

A day school kept by one Bird, who is spoken of as "an eminent writer and teacher of languages," prepared him, but, as it seems, in a very perfunctionary way, for the public school, since Lamb's comment afterwards on this elogium on Bird's school was: "Heaven knows what languages were taught in it then! I am sure that neither my sister nor myself brought any out of it, but a little of our native English."

In "Recollections of Christ's Hospital," and more particularly in "Christ's Hospital Five-and-Thirty Years Ago," Lamb has left probably the most accurate of his autobiographical writings, and with a list of exhibitioners before us we are able to verify his school companions by name, which in the Essays are mostly only conjecturable by initial.[1] In another essay, that "On Witches and other Night Fears," he tells us how alive to

[1] Thus the "Th." who "since fulfilled with ability various diplomatic functions at the Northern Courts," was Edward Thornton. The "C. V. Le G." of the "Wit Combats," was Charles Valentine Le Grice, who was living near Penzance so late as 1837. The junior "Le G." and "F." were respectively young Le Grice and Farell, both of whom died in the Peninsular War; and, finally, in the fine, frank-hearted "F." we are able to recognise Frederick William Franklin, some time Master of Hertford School, and in "Marmaduke T.," mildest of missionaries, Thompson, who graduated at Pembroke College, Cambridge.

nervous terrors he was, and how sensitive and superstitious. Nothing could more truly paint the gentleness and charm of his manners than the fact that he who was "small of stature, delicate of frame, and constitutionally nervous and timid," should have found the favour he did with his school companions. How he looked at this period has been well described by a contemporary. "Lamb was an amiable, gentle boy," says Mr. Le Grice, the schoolfellow mentioned in the footnote, and of whom Lamb makes affectionate mention in his "Recollections of Christ's Hospital," "very sensible and keenly observing, indulged by his schoolfellows and by his master on account of his infirmity of speech. His countenance was mild; his complexion clear brown, with an expression which might lead you to think he was of Jewish descent.[1] His eyes were not each of the same colour; one was hazel, the other had specks of grey in the iris, mingled as we see red spots in the bloodstone. His step was plantigrade, which made his walk slow and peculiar, adding to the staid appearance of his figure." In Lamb's recollections of his own school days, he could not resist a little bit of

[1] His well-known remark on Braham the singer, that he was a compound of the Jew, the gentleman, and the angel, might apply to Elia himself.

humorous pleasantry for having written his first paper on Christ's Hospital under his own name in 1818, and afterwards considering that it had been, perhaps, too one-sided, he supplemented it by a second essay, two years later, under his *nom-de-plume* of Elia, in which he pretends to correct and otherwise modify the work of "Mr. Lamb."

What makes the school days of Elia so interesting to us now, and what at the time gave so decided a bias to his mind, although in this connection Talfourd goes, perhaps, beyond the mark when he assigns to its influence all that Lamb has added to the world's source of pleasure, was his friendship, carried on almost uninterruptedly till the poet's death, with Coleridge. No two minds could, in most essentials, have differed more thoroughly, yet no two men have been drawn together by closer bonds of sympathy and love. Their religious belief and those opinions which turn the higher philosophy into a kind of idealised religion, were identical; both were Unitarians, believing in the writings of Priestley and his doctrine of necessity. No impulse produces so sure a connection between men as identity of religious belief, and we can imagine the effect of one of Coleridge's dissertations on "fate, free will, fore-knowledge absolute," on the simple-minded, sensitive Elia.

"Did you ever hear me preach, Charles?" once asked the metaphysician.

"I've never heard you do anything else," was the humorous reply.[1]

What Coleridge's influence may, without question, be credited with, was its quickening power on the latent genius which lay hidden in his friend's mind. As the poet himself had been touched by the sonnets of Bowles, so Lamb was charmed, and, more particularly in his excursions into verse, influenced by the subtler intellect and nobler thought of Coleridge.

Almost immediately after his removal from Christ's Hospital, Lamb entered a post of some kind in the South Sea House, concerning which period no authority remains to us except his essay entitled, "The South Sea House." "A magnificent relic," he calls it, and its clerks, he adds, "partook of the genius of the place." Not long after, however, he went to the East India House, and there remained a sober and diligent worker, with a continually increasing salary till within about nine years of his death.

[1] This is what De Quincey means when he speaks of Lamb's "talent for saying keen, pointed things, sudden flashes, or revelations of hidden truths, in a short condensed form of words."

Of his relations, his bedridden mother, his superannuated father, "a very tyrant at cribbage," as he himself has recorded, his brother, twelve years older than himself, and his sister Mary, the afflicted companion of his life, Elia has told us in more than one delightful essay. Of all his recollections of his earlier years, there is nothing more pathetic than his account of the terrible calamity that so suddenly befell him. "God has preserved me to my senses," he says, as if that power of realising his misfortune was the one attribute saved from the general wreck of a lifetime's associations. "My poor, dear, dearest sister, the unhappy and unconscious instrument of the Almighty's judgment on our house," is the affecting way in which he on another occasion refers to her. Time, the great consoler, did for him what no human aid could have effected, and if he could not say in the words of Spenser,

> "Time and sufficed fates to former kynd
> Shall us restore,"

yet he could bear witness to the fact that it had enabled him to anticipate with patience the ever-recurring phases of madness in his beloved sister, and to remember with fortitude the grief consequent on the death of his mother; and the self-

devotion with which he watched over his sister to the exclusion of all thoughts of self-interest or of pleasure, affords a picture without its parallel in the annals of literary history. Who can forget the tale which tells of how, on one occasion, Charles Lloyd met the brother and sister, in the fields near Hoxton, walking hand in hand, and weeping bitterly, for the fatal madness had given its usual premonitory signs, and they were going towards the asylum.

Lamb's poetical works, although it was in this branch of literature that he took his initiating step, were never calculated to stamp their author as a poetical genius. What he owed to Coleridge [1] was probably more reflected in his verse than in anything else; although, as it has been remarked, "it was no faint reflection of Coleridge's, but was streaked with delicate yet distinct traits, which proved it an emanation from within." But this can only be accurately predicated of some of his choicest pieces, and although his verse was undoubtedly too unjustly sneered at by the reviews, the criticisms of which about this period were a good deal more personal than critical,[2] yet it is to

[1] The influence of Coleridge is particularly noticeable in the sonnet, "Written at Midnight by the Sea-side after a Voyage."

[2] "We deal not in reasonings, but in assertions," says

some of his miscellaneous pieces—such as "Hester," with its more than beautiful eight concluding lines, "The Farewell to Tobacco," written, as he confessed to Wordsworth, in the metre and, to a great extent, in the manner of his favourite, Withers, "On an Infant Dying as soon as Born," written over twenty years later than these, but especially to that most beautifully tender and touching piece called, "The Old Familiar Faces," in which every verse (curious three-lined unrhymed stanzas) seems to bring before our eyes some particular scene from the life of its author,—that we must turn, if we would properly estimate his true position among the minor poets. The lines,

> "I had a friend, a kinder friend has no man,—
> Like an ingrate I left my friend abruptly!"

refer to a momentary difference which had for some time estranged him from Coleridge. Canon Ainger thus gives the cause of this temporary quarrel:—"When Coleridge was on the eve of his visit to Germany, a foolish message of his, 'If Lamb requires any knowledge, let him apply to me,' had been repeated to Lamb by some in-

Professor Wilson in the *Edinburgh Review*. He says it, it is true, facetiously, but it is a case of there being "many a true word spoken in jest."

judicious friend, and did not tend to improve matters. Lamb retaliated by sending Coleridge a grimly humorous list of 'Theses quædam Theologicæ,' to be by him 'defended or oppugned (or both) at Leipsic or Göttingen.' Numbers five and six in this list may be given as a sample—'Whether the higher order of the seraphim illuminati ever sneer?' 'Whether pure intelligences can love, or whether they can love anything besides pure intellect?' The rest are in the same vein, and if they have any point at all, it cannot lie in an allusion to certain airs of lofty superiority in which Coleridge had indulged to the annoyance of his friend." "The friend of my bosom, thou more than a brother," seems to have been Lloyd, who for a time filled the place in Lamb's regard left vacant by Coleridge.

In spite of Coleridge's friendly note, in the volume of poetry published conjointly by the friends in 1796, to the effect that the "effusions signed C. L. were written by Mr. Charles Lamb of the India House. Independently of the signature, their superior merit would have sufficiently distinguished them," Lamb was ever far from joining in the confidence of his friend, nor could his self-distrust be overcome by Coleridge's encouragement; and Talfourd notes with what slow-

ness and at what long intervals his poems were produced.

In 1798 appeared a small volume of "blank verse," by Charles Lloyd and Charles Lamb. In this second venture, Lamb's most successful effort was the piece called "The Grandame." Like most of his poetical works, it has a personal basis, a characteristic which is not irreconcilable with the epithet of "plaintive," which has not inaptly been applied to his work as well as to that of Lloyd.

Lamb, who was always uncertain of himself in the poetic vein, and who did not greatly benefit by the publication of his verse, determined to try another field, and in the same year as the publication of the book of "blank verse," he produced the little story, or, as Talfourd calls it, the "Miniature Romance," entitled "Rosamund Gray."

The elements of the tale are as unreal and improbable as they well could be; of plot, properly so-called, there is practically nothing, for Lamb, neither in his romances nor his dramas, could ever rise to this necessary machinery, and he has said in another connection that he could do the dialogue (of his play "The Pawnbroker's Daughter"), "but the plot; I believe I must omit it altogether." There are also too many traces of the influence of the authors Lamb had lately been reading, such as

Richardson and Mackenzie, to allow of its being a perfect or original work; but what makes it at once so interesting and beautiful is the indescribable charm with which its author so well knew how to accentuate its merits and to hide its faults. It is valuable in another way, however, for we see in it the development and gradual change working in Lamb's mind at this time, since it is as personal as anything he ever penned; and in the allusions to such authors as Walton and Withers and Burns, we know as well to whose literary predilections we are listening as to whose judicious quotations we are indebted. "What a lovely thing is 'Rosamund Gray!' How much knowledge of the sweetest and deepest part of our nature in it!" writes Shelley from Leghorn in 1819, with what will seem to some people exaggerated praise; and Dowden, in his life of Shelley, records how "Rosamund Gray" had given the poet "a high sense of the writer's familiarity with the deepest and sweetest parts of our human nature."

The groundwork of the story turns on the ruin of a village maiden by a villain endowed with the sinister name of Matravis, a name suggested to Lamb by that of one of the murderers of Edward II. in Marlowe's play. The scene is laid in the village of Widford in Hertfordshire, and the

cottage in which the heroine is supposed to have dwelt is still, according to Canon Ainger, pointed out. That her counterpart really existed is more than probable by the tradition which still holds that in "Rosamund Gray" we have the image of Lamb's first and only love, "the fairest among women" of the "Old Familiar Faces."

Lamb made a few pounds over this venture, and the *Monthly Review*, which had been bitter against his poems, reviewed "Rosamund Gray," though tardily, yet more tolerantly, calling it "a pathetic and interesting story in which the reader who has a mind capable of enjoying rational and normal sentiment will feel much gratification."

Notwithstanding the air of country-life which pervades "Rosamund Gray," and which might almost lead the ignorant to imagine that its author was country-bred and a lover of nature, the case is altogether the reverse, for Lamb loved London, and only London, with a devotion as true as ever Dr. Johnson had towards the Metropolis, and no part of London was regarded with so tender a feeling as the precincts of the Temple; indeed, the Temple was to him what Canonbury Tower was to Goldsmith, or Rydal Water to Wordsworth, and Mr. J. Fuller-Russell has told us that he "hated

the country, and loved to walk on the London Road (when he was living at Enfield), because then he could fancy he was wending thither." And there are many other evidences extant, both his own and his friends, which go to prove this; thus we find him in the year 1800, joyful at being settled with his sister in Mitre Court Buildings. "I live at No. 16 Mitre Court Buildings, a pistol-shot off Baron Maseres. . . . He lives on the ground floor for convenience of the gout; I prefer the attic storey for the air." Nine years later he had moved to No. 4 Inner Temple Lane, "where I mean to live and die," he writes to Manning, and he gossips on in his own inimitable strain of his surroundings and of his intentions.

It is not surprising that Lamb, who so dearly loved the play, even in his earliest childhood, when he and his sister used to save up their odd shillings in order to indulge in seats in the pit, and forget themselves and their surroundings in the witchery of the scene, should have turned dramatic author himself. Immersed in the study of Beaumont and Fletcher and Massinger, not yet having published his "Specimens of English Dramatic Poets," but already critically acquainted with much of their work: it was not strange that his first attempt should be in most things a replica of their

style, and that Godwin, happening to come across the two lines,

> "To see the sun to bed and to arise,[1]
> Like some hot amorist with glowing eyes,"

should have asked in which of the Elizabethan dramatists they were to be found.

"John Woodvil"[2] was, however, at least two hundred years behind the times, and then it lacked plot. Lamb did not see that even though contemporary drama was in a bad way, yet that way cannot be ameliorated by retrograde movement. "Hang the age!" he once exclaimed, "I'll write for antiquity." He did so, and his play was never acted. He had shown it in its earlier form, when its name was "Pride's Cure," to Coleridge and Southey, and they with one accord dissuaded him from publishing, but he longed to see it on the stage, and at Christmas of that year he sent it to Kemble, the manager of Drury Lane, where it eventually got lost, and Lamb was obliged to provide another copy; but the play was declined as unsuitable. It was not strange that it should be,

[1] Probably a reflection of the line of Titania, "To have my love to bed and to arise," as in *The Midsummer Night's Dream.*

[2] He lost £25 by "John Woodvil," which, in conversation with Mr. J. Fuller-Russell, he called his best effort.

for it is a curious medley of lines tuned from Shakespeare's lyre, and of passages of the veriest bathos, and while, as has been remarked, that though "it is impossible seriously to weigh the merits of 'John Woodvil' as a drama, it is yet of interest as the result of the studies of a young man of fine taste and independent judgment, in a field of English literature which had long lain unexplored."

Where, however, Lamb committed a great mistake, was in making the action of the play take place at the time of the Restoration, when all the characters are obviously modelled on the work of the Elizabethan dramatists; in fact, the author himself has confessed as much. "When I wrote 'John Woodvil,'" he tells us, "Beaumont and Fletcher and Massinger were then a *first love*, and from what I was so freshly conversant in, what wonder if my language imperceptibly took a tinge?" It was thus by too closely following the literary guidance of the old dramatists, without properly taking into account the historic influences and material conditions, as Mr. Archer phrases it, under which their plays were produced, that he was led into errors, both as a critic of this period, and as a follower in this school. The material value, however, of Lamb's discoveries in this par-

ticular field of English literature more than compensated for his sometimes partial criticism or his defective play-writing.

The reviewers of the time were unconscious of such a possibility. Ignorant themselves of this period, they either resented an alien being the first to break ground in these new fields, or they underestimated the significance of the labour. To them it seemed that the author of "John Woodvil" was, if not a vulgar plagiarist, at least a blind follower of methods and metre which had long been done away with. The anti-Jacobin, curiously ignorant, as it seems to us now, of Lamb's political, or as one ought more correctly to put it, non-political opinions, took the opportunity of bracketing his name with those of Coleridge, Southey and Lloyd, in a revolutionary quartette, whose members took unto themselves the credit of being champions of French socialism.

Lamb's *jeu d'esprit*, for it can hardly be called a play, which he named "Mr. H——," had the questionable benefit of one night's representation, and got summarily condemned. It was too slight and wire-drawn for the theatre, and the climax, in which Mr. H——'s real name is discovered (a very vulgar name, by the by), is neither clever nor amusing. It is characteristic of Lamb's philosophy that

though the failure of "Mr. H——" meant something more to him than merely a wound to his *amour propre*, he thus writes to Hazlitt after the performance:—"Mary is a little cut at the ill-success of 'Mr. H——,' which came out last night and *failed*. I know you'll be sorry, but never mind. We are determined not to be cast down. I am going to leave off tobacco, and then we must thrive. A smoky man must write smoky farces."[1] It is matter for wonder that its author, whose keen critical perception led him to join in the hissing of his own play, had not sufficient acumen to abstain from putting his production on the boards. Even when read, it so largely depends on puns and somewhat vulgar pleasantries, that it is difficult to reverse the popular verdict. Critics often err in their estimate of original composition, but the public seldom go wrong on such matters.

Lamb made two other attempts at dramatic writing,—"The Wife's Trial, or The Intruding Widow: A Dramatic Poem," which the author declared to be founded on Crabbe's tale of "The Confident," and "The Pawnbroker's Daughter." Neither rises above the level of the average farce of that period, except that here and there are to be seen strokes of Lamb's native wit, which, without

[1] Ainger's "Lamb."

being sufficient to drag the plays from the sloughs of mediocrity, only serve to accentuate their faults.

From authorship to criticism was with Lamb a long cry. The critic is essentially the thinker and observer; he can detect faults although, being similarly placed to the author, he might no more than he have been able to avoid them; he can recognise beauties although he may not be able to create them. Thus it was with Lamb, and we have never had a more acute or more loving critic of the Elizabethan dramatists than the author of "John Woodvil."

How thoroughly and accurately he was acquainted with the plays of our greatest dramatist is evidenced by the "Tales from Shakespeare," which, in 1807, he, conjointly with his sister, published in Godwin's series of books for children. How truly they caught the popular taste is shown by the rapidity with which a second edition was called for.

Mary Lamb has left a delightful little record of their habits of working at this congenial task. "Charles," she writes, "has written 'Macbeth,' 'Othello,' 'King Lear,' and has begun 'Hamlet.' You would like to see us, as we often sit writing on one table (but not on one cushion sitting) like *Hermia*

and *Helena*, in the 'Midsummer Night's Dream,' or rather like an old literary Darby and Joan, I taking snuff, and he groaning all the while, and saying he can make nothing of it, which he always says till he has finished, and then he finds out he has made something of it."

By the very construction of the book, however, it is impossible for Lamb to show in it anything but his thorough grasp of the situations and intricacies of the plots of all the plays he illustrated. Although his perfect and critical knowledge of his great original made his taste a congenial and appropriate one, his sister did her part as ably and as well; indeed, Charles always affirmed (but that was his way) that hers was the better part. How great his critical acumen was, and with what a tender love he had studied the older dramatists, is made at once obvious by his "Specimens of English Dramatic Poets Contemporary with Shakespeare." "It is to have notes," he says, writing on this project to Manning, and he more largely formulates his ideas in the preface to the "Characters" of these dramatic writers. "When I selected for publication in 1808 specimens of English dramatic poets who lived about the time of Shakespeare, the kind of extracts which I was anxious to give were not so much passages of wit and humour,

though the old plays are rich in such, as scenes of passion, sometimes of the deepest quality, interesting situations, serious descriptions, that which is more nearly allied to poetry than to wit, and to tragic rather than comic poetry."

"The very idea of the collection was a bold one," says Canon Ainger. "When we cast our eyes over the list of now familiar names, Marlowe, and Peele, Marston, Chapman, Ford, and Webster, from whom Lamb chose his scenes, we must not forget that he was pleading their merits before a public which knew them only by names, if it knew them at all."

The value of this publication lies in the fact that it practically headed the renaissance of the study of this period in the literature of England. Lamb had not the philosophical depth of thought which later on Coleridge brought to bear on the same subject. Taking the dramas as wholes, he may not have equalled Hazlitt in critical perception; looking merely at the more learned side of the question, he may not have possessed the scholarly bent of Dyce; but in sympathy with his subjects, and in love for their work, he more than equalled those who followed in his wake. Lamb, although he does not anywhere hint it, seems to feel that it is in the beauty of isolated passages that a dramatist

must be judged, and there are few critics who have had so peculiar a power in selecting the most beautiful passages or the choicest gems. But in reading them we must never forget that it requires something beyond mere extracts to influence our perception, and more than love to sway our judgment.

It can hardly be denied that Lamb is sometimes unduly partial in urging the claims of his favourites. There were two excuses, however, for this exaggerated criticism. In the first place, the contemporary stage had sunk so deeply into sentimental insipidities, and other narrow limitations, that Lamb, gazing back upon the masculine and vigorous treatment of the older dramatists, saw even in their superhuman horrors and startling crudities the acme of proper play-writing. Thus, Webster does not surprise him with his horrors in "The Duchess of Malfi," or "The White Devil," nor do the "virtues clad in flesh and blood," as he himself calls them, of Ford or Tourneur fail to draw from him words, as it will seem to many, of hypercritical commendation. In the second place, as a pioneer into the primeval forests of this branch of our literature, it was almost necessary for him, if he would make headway and clear a path for others, to exaggerate the beauties he disclosed, in order

that his followers might be attracted to them. It was, to use another figure, necessary to *caricature* their beauties, since nothing attracts the notice and compels the attention so truly as this method. We gain, it is true, an imperfect knowledge of each particular feature, but we carry away with us a lasting remembrance of the whole.

The dramatic essays of Lamb are not among the least interesting of his literary productions. Who can forget the charm of "My First Play," with its reminiscences of Drury Lane: or the more critical paper, "On Some of the Old Actors:" or that on "The Artificial Comedy of the Last Century:" or even the essay on Shakespeare's plays, the biographical notices of Liston, Munden, and Elliston, or the letter on "Hissing at the Theatre"? All show the joyous nature of the essayist; all present him as a happy creature endowed with the critical powers of a man, together with the boyish excitement of a youth.

We have headed this paper "Charles Lamb, Essayist," for it is in this character that Lamb stands unrivalled among literary types. In the August of 1820 the first essay of Elia[1]—that on "Recollections of the South Sea House"—appeared

[1] "The 'Essays of Elia' are as exquisite a gem amongst the jewellery of literature as any nation can show."—*De Quincey.*

in the pages of the *London Magazine*, a periodical which had only been started in the previous January. Three years later the first series appeared in a collected form.

We have the essays — immortal book! open before us. What is there new that can be said of their inexhaustible charm, what of their invariable good humour, what of their sparkling fun? How long could we not linger with Mrs. Battle in her opinions on whist! How often could we not smile (not unkindly) at her predilection, declared *sub rosa* for Hearts! Must we not all respect her little idiosyncrasies, and her home-made logic? Must we not all have a fellow feeling, albeit we do not all in our hearts agree, with her opinions of cribbage, with its, to her mind, vulgar "go," or "that's a go," or again, "two for his heels," a determination not to enunciate which form of words brought about the forfeiture of a rubber, but left her conscience clear?

Then what a perfect mixture of whimsicality and pathos is the chapter on "Ears." How the gentle Elia owns up as frankly as Lord Macaulay to having no ear for music, but then how pathetically he tells what airs have affected him, and by whom played,[1] "the gentlest sure that ever merited

[1] This, by-the-bye, is in "Eliana."

the appellation of gentlewoman." Then his vain attempts, as fruitless as his endeavours, to like Scotchmen (as told in one of his most perfect essays, that on "Imperfect Sympathies"), to hum with the necessary accuracy, "God save the King," although he went about all his life, as he tells us, "whistling and humming of it over to myself in solitary corners."

The same pleasant self-depreciation opens the essay entitled "The Old and the New Schoolmaster," and the writer consoles himself in the conclusion that "a man may do very well with a very little knowledge, and scarce be found out in a mixed company." But if deficient in a proper appreciation of geographical boundaries or historical truths (so-called), Lamb was, on most subjects in which the ordinary run of men little trouble themselves, a perfect mine of information, and then, with such a man as he, a natural genius was little likely to be troubled by the slight defects in learning of which he has so humorously reminded us.

His way of telling a tale or an anecdote is so inimitable that we doubt if in all literature it can be rivalled. Who does not know his two memorable examples of the thickness of a Scotchman's intellect to appreciate a sarcasm or a joke, in the essay on "Imperfect Sympathies"? He is perhaps

unnecessarily, if not unjustly (if such a word can be applied to *his* criticisms), severe on those north of the Tweed; but then, how witty he is! "Above all, you must beware of indirect expression before a Caledonian," he says. "Clap an extinguisher upon your irony, if you are unhappily blest with a vein of it. Remember you are upon your oath. I have a print of a graceful female after Leonardo da Vinci, which I was showing off to Mr. ——. After he had examined it minutely, I ventured to ask him how he liked *my beauty* (a foolish name it goes by among my friends), when he very gravely assured me that 'he had considerable respect for my character and talents' (so he was pleased to say), 'but had not given himself much thought about the degree of my personal pretensions.' The misconception," adds Lamb, "staggered me, but did not seem much to disconcert him."

Here is the other, perhaps even better known, anecdote from the same essay: "I was present not long since at a party of North Britons, where a son of Burns was expected, and happened to drop a silly expression (in my South British way), that I wished it were the father instead of the son, when four of them started up at once to inform me that 'that was impossible, because he was dead.'

An impracticable wish, it seems, was more than they could conceive."

How startling sometimes seem his prejudices; but then, how kindly put they always are. Listen to what he says of the Jewish race. "I have, in the abstract, no disrespect for Jews. They are a piece of stubborn antiquity, compared with which Stonehenge is in its nonage. They date beyond the pyramids. But I should not care to be in habits of familiar intercourse with any of that nation. I confess that I have not the nerve to enter their synagogues. Old prejudices cling about me; I cannot shake off the story of 'Hugh of Lincoln.'" And again, in his more whimsical mood, he speaks of a moderate Jew as being "a more confounding piece of anomaly than a wet Quaker." But does he here in reality wish to imply any particular disrespect for Quakers any more than for Jews? Not so, for he says further on, "I love Quaker ways and Quaker worship;" and when Barnard Barton was somewhat offended at Lamb's reference to Quakers, which to the Friend seemed unseemly ridicule, Elia particularly excused himself, and explained that Quakers were in reality as dear as other men to him, and some of them perhaps dearer, and by the affectionate references to Lamb in a letter of Barton's to Keymer,

the Quaker seemed to have been quite satisfied of the truth of the assertion.

Who does not know, and knowing love, the immortal "Dissertation on Roast Pig,"[1] or the beautiful allegory of the "Dream-children"; the delightful essay on "Old China," or the touching one on "Poor Relations"; the recollections of "Mackery End in Hertfordshire," or the observation in the essay on "Chimney-sweeps"?

In his feminine delicacy of touch and perfect command of human sympathy, together with the intellectual gifts which are sometimes more than human, he is in a way the Schumann of literature.

With the autobiographical element which so largely runs through the essays, the egotistical almost necessarily comes in; but it is an egotism as different from the egotism of Addison or Steele, or, in fact, of any writers in the same style (except, perhaps, Montaigne), as it is an egotism without a touch of vanity or self-assertion; and, indeed, in this class of writing, egotism is a necessary concomitant. "The essayist," says George Eliot, "must be personal, or his hearers can feel no manner of interest in him."

[1] It has been suggested in no deprecating spirit that Lamb drew his idea for this essay from a tale that occurs in the "Turkish Spy."

Lamb's style in the essays defies both criticism and analysis; but what strikes us more particularly is the entire absence of affectation, and it is to this that it is in a great measure due that, as a true essayist ought to be, he is the friend of all, a friendship only more closely assured by his invariable good-humour, for "humour makes men brothers, and is perhaps more influential in an essay than in most places else," as Henley says. In short, the "Essays of Elia" is a perfectly good book; for a good book is like a fine sunset—look where we will, we shall find transcendent beauties and infinite variety, with every element capable of being combined into one perfect and harmonious whole.

Comparisons are generally either unfair or inaccurate, for unless the two personalities, which are thus brought into juxtaposition, are almost identically the same, we cannot fail to obtain an exaggerated estimate of the one, and an incomplete picture of the other, for one of those compared must almost necessarily be the loser by it. There are certain cases, however, where one may venture to employ the use of comparison, from the fact of the embroidery, as we may term it, of two men's lives being particularly similar, without going too curiously or too deeply into their more immediate

inner characters. It will not then, perhaps, be considered as over-stepping the mark if some comparison of this kind be instituted between Charles Lamb and the great father of essayists, Montaigne. As essayists, in which character alone the comparison is drawn, the two men seem to have a peculiar analogy.

In the first place, both wrote with the greatest simplicity; we shall find in neither exaggeration of detail or pomposity of diction. Both, again, wrote in an autobiographical style; neither tells us so much what a man should love or hate, admire or fear, as what he particularly, whether it be Montaigne or Lamb, loved or hated, admired or feared. Both are gifted in an almost equal degree with that delightful power of taking their reader so entirely into their confidence, that when one has finished reading an essay of either, one feels as if one had left off listening to the familiar voice of a friend. Both possess pre-eminently that sure sign of true genius: the unconsciousness of being clever; both have the same simplicity which is child-like without being in the least childish. How each loves his books! How each shares with his readers confidences concerning his favourites! How prepared both are to bring forward apt quotations or anecdotes to uphold their opinion or to strengthen

their reasoning! How each is obviously pointing a moral, while seeming only to adorn a tale! Finally, how many things in Lamb's essays seem to belong to Montaigne! And might not this translated bit from the Frenchman's "Essay on Books," —"And whoever shall take me tripping in my ignorance will not in any sort displease me, for I should be very unwilling to become responsible to another for my writings who am not so to myself nor satisfied with them"—belong to Elia?

Most people recognise the united efforts of Charles Lamb and his sister[1] in the pleasant little tales, called, when collected together, "Mrs. Leicester's School," as well as in the "Poetry for Children,"[2] which formed a kind of sequel to it; but how many children who have read with absorbed interest the "History of Prince Dorus," or

[1] By the latest rescued letters of Lamb and his sister, we find that the latter was the authoress of a small book of poems, entitled "Poems by a Sister," and published in 1812, which had hitherto eluded the search of collectors and bibliographers. By the same collection of epistles, we are, too, happily made the possessors of a letter of Lamb's himself, which rivals almost in wit and humour the essay, "To Distant Correspondents," and the immortal letter addressed to Manning, preserved by Canon Ainger in his monograph on Lamb.

[2] The first recovered copy of this missing bibliographical treasure turned up in Adelaide, New South Wales—of all places!

"The Adventures of Ulysses," have known that for these charming tales, the amusement of the nursery and the solace of the sick-room, they are indebted to one of the kindliest and best of English writers? Lamb understood children thoroughly: an anomaly, since he had none himself, nor was he blessed, as it appears, with nephews and nieces; yet no one knew better than he the difference between children's books and childish books; it is for this reason that the two works just mentioned have become classics of the nursery.

De Quincey calls Lamb "inimitable," and then confesses that the word "is too limited in its meaning." "When I think of such a mind as Lamb's," says Shelley, in a letter to Leigh Hunt written in 1819 from Livorno, "when I see how unnoticed remain things of such exquisite and complete perfection, what should I hope for myself, if I had not higher objects in view than fame?" Even Macaulay, not always the most amiable of critics, says, "We admire his genius; we love the kind nature which appears in all his writings; and we cherish his memory as if we had known him personally."

It is known with what respect and affection Wilson, the Christopher North of the "Noctes Ambrosianiæ," speaks of Lamb in his "Twaddle on

Tweedside," notwithstanding Elia's candid avowal of his want of sympathy with North Britons; a criticism which drew words of praise from the mouth of Coleridge.

Lamb's power as a critic stands only on a less sure foundation than his geniality and unselfishness as a man. Whether he is discoursing (in more than one essay) on the beauties and merits of Hogarth, whom he knew and loved so well, or whether he is treating in his trenchant way of Elizabethan tragedy, or of comedy of a later date, he is talking about what he thoroughly understands and is handling his subjects with a vigour and acumen which few critics have brought to bear on them.

De Quincey once, in his quaint way, congratulated the admirers of Lamb's works, on the fact that they would always be a select few; a judgment which is being surely reversed by the flight of time, and perhaps was not very accurate when it was first formulated.

The opinions which have been passed upon the man himself, by contemporaries, are of the kind we might expect from those who have delivered them. Thus Carlyle found his conversation "poor make-shift for wit," and himself "a sorry phenomenon,"[1] Macready was struck by a remark so

[1] Canon Ainger has shown how substantially just such a

merely humorous and trivial that it certainly was not intended to leave any lasting impression; but those who really knew the man thoroughly, recognised his intrinsic worth below the more shallow exterior of the wit and the inveterate punster; and in the opinions of Coleridge and Shelley, Hazlitt and Southey, Godwin and Wordsworth, we shall not fail to recognise how noble a self-devotion, how true a friendship, and how genial a nature made up the character of Charles Lamb.

It is not frequently the case that a man is enabled to win at once the love and esteem of such illustrious contemporaries as these. The secret probably lies in the fact that so few writers have possessed in an equal degree such humanity of expression or such kindliness of feeling as Lamb; gentle he was no less in his writings than in his actions, and, to use a line of Shelley's, "he owned all sympathies and outraged none."

De Quincey, of all his contemporaries, has written most exhaustively on his character and his works. In his "Recollections of Charles Lamb,"

verdict was. "It is only too probable," he says, "that the presence of the austere and dyspeptic Scotchman (one of that nation Lamb had all his days been trying in vain to like) made him more than usually disposed to produce his entire stock of frivolity;" and he adds, "he had a perverse delight in shocking uncongenial society."

he notes his princely hospitality, princely, not in the magnificence of his entertainments, for he was a poor man, but in the opulence of his spirit; he perpetuates, too, the "peculiar emphasis and depth of his courtesy," a quality which, De Quincey adds, was to him "a really chivalrous feeling springing from the heart, and cherished with the sincerity of a duty." Another point in his character is spoken of—one, indeed, not too frequently prevalent—*i.e.*, the habit of "hoping cheerfully and kindly on behalf of those who were otherwise the objects of moral blame." Indeed, his charity went so far in this respect that a man only required to have been the object of injustice or calumny to at once lay claim to his sympathy and support, and be sure of obtaining it, no matter whether the injured man was a dull man, or, for the matter of that, a bad one.

"He was not, as a man of genius, in the first rank, simply because his range was a contracted one; within that range he was perfect," adds De Quincey, speaking of the literary side of Lamb's character. But if to teach high moral lessons combined with wit, which could conjure up laughter holding both his sides, if to alleviate suffering by the power of words, if to be at once gentle and unselfish, noble and good, in work as well as in life,

constitute the elements of a great writer, then Charles Lamb is worthy to occupy a foremost rank among those who have already obtained niches in the Valhalla of Literature.

Carey's lines may still be read in the churchyard of Edmonton, on the tomb which covers his remains, as well as those of his much beloved sister; but his noblest epitaph is in his life of unselfish sacrifice and loving devotion, and in his works and the gentle spirit which inspired them; for, as Wordsworth has written:

"Oh, he was good, if e'er a good man lived!"

Thomas Carlyle,

PHILOSOPHER.

'The stormy sophist with his mouth of thunder,
Clothed with loud words and mantled in the might
Of darkness and magnificence of night."

—*Swinburne.*

In applying the epithet of Philosopher to the great man whose name heads this chapter, we have acted in no way hurriedly or unadvisedly, as the readers of Mr. Froude's work would possibly suppose. Carlyle has been likened to Diogenes without his tub; and this, in a more felicitous way than might at first be assumed, very sufficiently describes the "Sage of Chelsea." For, as the tub may be considered a kind of metaphorical cover to the inmost feeling of the wise man who dwelt in it, since much as we have heard of Diogenes' content and surliness, we have never been able to come at what his home life really was like, so the philosopher who has no tub will undoubtedly display to those who take pleasure in such interviewing kinds of investigation the same infirmities as those

of the most ordinary mortals born with very much the same amount of patience. Shakespeare has said that no amount of philosophy will make a stand against the torments of toothache.

> "For there was never yet philosopher
> That could endure the toothache patiently,
> However they have writ the style of gods,
> And made a push at chance and sufferance." [1]

Now, metaphorically, Carlyle had toothache of one kind or another all his life, and in consequence, notwithstanding his philosophy, most of his friends who happened to come in his way at the time knew when he was enduring the worst twinges.

So, as it would require a brave man to apply exclusively the above title to any individual, the term is used here in reference to the author of "Past and Present" and "Sartor Resartus," and is in no way to be applied to Thomas Carlyle the man.

"The present is a noisy and affected age," says a recent writer; "it is given overmuch to clamorous devotion and extravagant repudiation; there is an element of swagger in all its words and ways; it has a distressing and immoral turn for

[1] "Much Ado About Nothing," Act v., sc. 1.

publicity." No one saw this more plainly than Carlyle, and no one raised his hand more obstinately or more untiringly to do away with the shams and falsities in the world. He went along the road of life, as Longfellow somewhere says:

"Gathering from the pavements' crevice, as a floweret of the soil,
The nobility of labour—the long pedigree of toil."

As Dickens and Thackeray worked from their several standpoints, so Carlyle laboured according to his lights in the same fields and for the same objects.

In the midst of the chaotic phrasing in which all his thoughts are clothed, we cannot fail to be touched by his overwhelming earnestness; and by this very earnestness, much that, through its vagueness of metaphor, fails to reach our heads, without difficulty goes to our hearts.

A mind thus naturally directed in the right way was backed up by an amount of perseverance and energy and a faculty of "taking infinite pains," called by Goethe the secret of genius, which seems almost incredible. In the Edinburgh University, of which, however, he thought so little that he has referred to it in his "Sartor Resartus" as "the worst of universities hitherto discovered out of

England and Spain," he got through a prodigious amount of study on all subjects and in many languages. But the varied nature of his reading, and the shrewd observation and analytical discrimination he brought to bear on everything he had studied, is too apparent in all his works to need historical witness.

Carlyle was one who considered that a man's works should be but a commentary on a man's life. "He who would write heroic poems," he once said, "should make his whole life like a heroic poem." It is for this reason that all he has done has been fraught with a zeal and earnestness, which alone come from a firm and settled conviction of the truth; and from the days when he rummaged out old books in the University of Edinburgh, till the time when he lived, one of the greatest literary figures of the age, in Chelsea, his life presents one consistent and harmonious whole of earnest working and deep thought. For indeed he was beyond most men who have lived, a thinker, and what he has left us are not merely fine writings, but rather written thoughts, in which his mind is as surely reflected as is a body in a pool of water, in which we shall find the most perfect reflections in the deepest places.

And in another way, there is an analogy between

the stillness of the pool and the depth of the philosopher's thoughts and convictions. What he did was ever done quietly and earnestly. He never wrote for the sake of writing; he, as it were, was forced to do it, and what he undertook he carried through without blustering or noise; for, as he has himself written, "the deepest force is the stillest," and in another place, "as calmness is the characteristic of strength, so the weightiest causes may be the most silent."

Again, without very often the appearance of being so, he is in reality one of the most tolerant of writers, and if he is no better an historian than Macaulay, it is this tolerance and impartiality that make him a much more reliable chronicler. "If we really desire to understand the truth on any subjects, tolerance may be regarded as the most indispensable of all pre-requisites;" and again, "intolerance, animosity, can forward no cause."

Quite as well to Carlyle may be applied the phrase which was originally used in reference to one to whom he has no remote likeness, Martin Luther, "whose words," it was once said, "were half battles."

Carlyle was so continually warring against sham and cant that it would have been strange indeed had he not come into collision with many who

thought themselves personally attacked. "No man lives without jostling and being jostled," he says in his essay on Scott; "in all his ways he has to *elbow* himself through the world, giving and receiving offence." But in spite of offence he went on with a set purpose, never ceasing to raise his voice strenuously against all kinds of hypocrisy. Many, many times the student of his works will find the same thoughts reiterated, for, as Oliver Wendell Holmes says, "a thought is often original though you have uttered it a hundred times."

But Carlyle did something more than this, though such a fight as he made was the life work of an ordinary man; he introduced to us German literature, that literature which, as he himself has recorded, it is so difficult to know thoroughly. In England, about the year of grace 1820, it was hardly supposed, incredible as it may seem, that Germany had a literature. Schiller was known in a vague way, certainly, by the translation Coleridge had made of "Wallenstein." Scott had seen the charm which lay in Burger's ballads, and had opened indeed his literary career by a version of Goethe's "Goetz von Berlichingen," which was published as early as 1799, but the mediocre Kotzebue was considered the literary representative of a country where Goethe, Schiller, Heyne, Lessing and

Richter were at the height of their renown. What Carlyle did to make known the power and beauties of these writers to the English thinking people cannot be over-estimated, and what acknowledgments he afterwards received from Germany, and more particularly from its great literary chief, were neither exaggerated nor unmerited.

In looking through his books and essays we shall hardly find a single great man of the Teutonic race, who has not received, in one way or another, something more than a passing notice, and oftener deep study from him. What he did to spread the fame of Goethe must be more particularly noticed later on, but in glancing through his collected essays, we shall find how carefully and critically, how lovingly, and how well, he has examined the works of Richter (one of his more particular favourites), of Werner, Heyne, Novalis, and Schiller; we shall notice how accurately he has discriminated the relative position of German literary life in his essay on the "State of German Literature," and how painstakingly he has investigated its dramatic claims in his paper on "German Playwrights."

In 1823 and 1824, Carlyle contributed his "Life

of Schiller" to the *London Magazine*. Later on the work was reprinted with additional chapters, to avoid the booksellers of "the pirate species," who were preparing to reprint it for their own benefit. But the author himself always undervalued the work, even going so far as to term it "this somewhat insignificant book," in its preface. It is not, however, quite clear why he should so have under-estimated the worth of the production. It is written in a bold, fearless, accurate, and particularly clear manner, clearer, indeed, than much of his other work. On every page we have evidence of his analytical power of criticism, and of his careful weighing of evidence, together with a love of his subject and an amount of knowledge that gives it a breadth and unity which can come from no other source. However, authors are so often the worst judges of the value of their own works, that perhaps no other reason is necessary; certainly, it seems hard to arrive at any.

"It is admirable in Carlyle," once said Goethe in conversation with Eckermann, "that in his judgments of our German authors he has especially in view the mental and moral care;" and again, "What an earnest man he is! and how he has studied us Germans! He is almost more at home in our literature than ourselves." Such, indeed,

was nearly literally the case. Carlyle had thoroughly mastered not merely the writings and sayings of the literary men of the fatherland; he had thoroughly saturated himself in their very thoughts and motives. Their literature appealed to him in a way in which no other people's literature, not even his own, had affected him. He always commenced by investigating a man's ethical capabilities; he began by studying his subject as a *thinker* before he attempted to see him as a writer or poet. The Germans are essentially a nation of thinkers, just as the French are a nation of pleasure-seekers, and we English, according to the famous Napoleonic dictum, which was not original, and therefore doubly true, are a nation of shopkeepers. There was thus something so congenial to Carlyle in the minds of the German writers, that it would have been sufficiently strange if one had not attracted the other. To say that he discovered German literature is not quite so accurate as to affirm that he was irresistibly drawn to the study of it, for one cannot properly be said to discover that which is already known, although it be known in but a shadowy and inconclusive way.

Every man of genius, in what state or condition he be, turns naturally to some more pre-eminent

genius than himself whom he may honour and love. Hazlitt worshipped Napoleon. Mr. Swinburne still has a sort of esoteric *cult* for Victor Hugo. In this relation Goethe stood to Carlyle. He might have said with Von Ense, "Goethe? When I think of *him* tears come into my eyes. All other men I love with my own strength; he teaches me to love with his."

It is difficult, if not impossible, to properly estimate the extent of the influence which the great German exercised on the mind of his English admirer. It was, undoubtedly, that kind of influence which most of us in the budding of our knowledge have instinctively felt for the *name* of some great man, although we may be almost wholly unacquainted with his life or his works. It is something which seems to tell us that here is an individual of greater power, of more unbounded aspirations, and more recognised genius than any that we have hitherto been accustomed to associate in our minds with splendour of action and originality of thought.

One looks back nowadays with a pity, not unmixed with scorn, at that blatant, thick-headed fellow who called himself a critic—he alone knew why—who found Goethe's "Wilhelm Meister," which Carlyle had translated in 1824, "eminently absurd,

puerile, incongruous, and affected . . . almost from beginning to end one flagrant offence against every principle of taste and every rule of composition." One feels less concern with the outlandish pleasantries of Maguire, who attempted to prove that he knew something of Goethe by practically affirming that Carlyle knew nothing at all. We are unhappily obliged to add De Quincey's name to those who found serious fault both with the original and the translation, and in his "Gallery of Female Portraits," taken from "Wilhelm Meister," he is almost vulgarly unfair to the book and its English exponent. Carlyle, who it is but right to say had his own misgivings of the work, which were, however, gradually, and as he came to know Goethe more thoroughly, effectually dispelled, was exceedingly angry at what he called "a very brutish review," written by "a cockney animalcule;" but on the whole he bore the attack with more magnanimity than could have been expected from one just setting out on his literary career, a career which might have been wrecked by such an adverse influence as that of the opium-eater. De Quincey himself eventually so far recognised the wrong he had done both the work and its translator as to do all he could to retract his adverse criticism, and to make an *amende honorable* to

Carlyle, with whom he afterwards became friends. Such an attack could hardly have been forgotten, and it is probable that Carlyle never entirely forgave its author.

Notwithstanding such an unpromising opening to his attempt to enlarge the understandings and open the minds of his countrymen, for man is ever prone to accept and believe in the novelties he finds out for himself, and to question and distrust those that are hunted out for him by others, Carlyle persevered, and in 1827 appeared his "Specimens of German Romance," being selections translated from the works of Tieck, Hoffmann, Richter, Goethe, and others. He was endeavouring by such work to open up to English readers the mine from which he himself had so largely profited. "I could tell you much," he writes to Murray as early as 1820, "about the new heaven and new earth which a slight study of German literature has revealed to me." But with the general public the case was very different; for those who knew anything at all of this literature, and they were few, regarded it as a mere hot-bed of mysticism, transcendentalism, and indeed of any attributes which were likely to render it vague and *unknowable*. Not satisfied with what he had already done, and which had met, to use Carlyle's own phrase in reference to

the world's reception of Werter, with "vehement acceptance" from Goethe himself, whose epistolary connection with Carlyle, and appreciation of what he had done, are among the most memorable incidents of his life, Carlyle contributed a large number of essays and reviews, chiefly to the *Edinburgh Review* and *Foreign Review*, on Goethe and his works, on Richter, Heyne, Schiller, etc. Each one is marked by a grasp of the subject and a vividness of word-painting which are unequalled in this style of writing; the essay on Goethe's "Helena" being particularly remarkable for the accuracy with which the translations incorporated in it are rendered, and for the love and reverence for its author which throughout is apparent, but which in no way serves to bias the critical perception of the writer.

Landor has written, "Great men lose somewhat of their greatness by being near us; ordinary men gain much." This was in no way the case with Carlyle's nearer acquaintance with the German writers, like Goethe and Schiller, Richter and Novalis; for like those who approach a statue, the nearer he got the more significant they appeared; and they were certainly no ordinary men.

Chief of the other essays from his pen which appeared at this time were those on Voltaire, Diderot, and Mirabeau, on Scott and on Burns; he also reviewed Boswell's Johnson, and wrote the marvellous sketch of the "History of the Diamond Necklace." Voltaire he treats as we should expect him to, conscientiously but frigidly, yet, on the whole, which is surprising, sympathetically. He notes his charity and his good nature, but he complains of "his inborn levity of nature, his entire want of earnestness," which militates, is Carlyle's inference, against his being "a great character." "There are things in this world to be laughed at, as well as things to be admired; and his is no complete mind that cannot give to each sort its due. Nevertheless, contempt is a dangerous element to sport in; a deadly one, if we habitually live in it." To suit Carlyle's standard of rectitude and usefulness, Voltaire was not earnest enough; he was merely "one of the best politicians on record—the *adroitest* of all literary men."

The essay on Diderot is a masterpiece. From the pen-stroke which shows us the town of Langres, where the encyclopædist was born, with its fifteen thousand inhabitants, "mostly employed in grinding knives," to the words which tell of his quiet though lingering death in July, 1784, the whole paper is an

elaborate review of the man's life and work, in which we learn more of the causes of the French Revolution, than we can glean from most books written for that very purpose. Diderot was not so much a sceptic as a *Denier*, according to Carlyle's formulation of phrase, and this is certainly only too apparent in his works, which are all more or less polemical. He treated of all things, and most things well, whether it be the novel, the drama, or criticism; and in "Le Neveu de Rameau," in "Père de Famille," or in the "Salons," we find proof that he was, as Carlyle justly says, "gifted by Nature for an artist;" "for strangely flashing through his mechanical encumbrances are rays of thought, which belong to the poet, to the prophet."

In writing on Mirabeau, that remarkable man who, had he lived, might have "directed the storm" of Revolution, and saved a nation a crime the more, Carlyle treats of one who in every way was worthy to be classed among his later heroes. He finds him a man of the most startling power of character, of quite a pre-eminent genius, yet so unfortunate in his times and his surroundings, that "candid history will say, that whatsoever of worst it was in the power of art to do against this young Gabriel Honoré, was done." A *thundering* man this, so like

a lion as he shakes, with a movement of his head, the dew-drops of hate, slander, and petty spite from his mane.

Burns is the subject of one of Carlyle's finest essays, and in his own words he "uniformly treats him as the high and remarkable man the public voice has now pronounced him to be;" and it is on reflection matter of some little surprise, when we remember Carlyle's questionable critical faculty with regard to poetry, that the author of "Tam o' Shanter," and the "Lines to a Mouse," should have been one of the three men selected later on by him as examples of the hero as writer. No one was more capable of enthusiasm with regard to true genius, and no one could estimate so skilfully the value of the life's work of such a one, as Carlyle, and in Burns he saw at once the greatest genius, coupled withal with misery and temptation which would have ruined a more moral man. It is for this reason that he says, "We love Burns, and we pity him," and again, "It is not chiefly as a poet, but as a man, that he interests and affects us."

With Scott he is equally sincere, almost equally impartial; he notes every mood in the man, and in spite of small weaknesses which none are without, he finds him not only "a noted but a notable man." He remembers the incident of the glass out of

which George IV. had drunk, but he also recollects his true goodness of heart; he recalls his large and perhaps somewhat improvident expenditures, but he none the less brings to mind his boundless hospitality and his large-minded charity. But though he can find in him beyond most others, "a love of the picturesque, of beautiful, vigorous, graceful things," he can discover little else, and he fails to discern that Scott was really great, though he allows that "since Shakespeare's time there has been no great speaker so unconscious of an aim in speaking."

The superficial will be apt to consider the essay too conscientious a one to be a good one, and even deeper thinkers will turn from it with less satisfaction than from many of the others.

Taking the four volumes of "Critical and Miscellaneous Essays" as a whole,[1] we shall find in them enough of varied criticism and deep thought to last, in this form of study, for what Mr. Ruskin calls "a life's liberal reading." To estimate them by the usual standard of this form of writing would be as ridiculous as unfair, for they have nothing in common with the works of such masters

[1] Carlyle wrote essays on Pitt, Nelson and Montaigne, as well as others, which were incorporated in the "Edinburgh Encyclopædia" when conducted by Sir D. Brewster.

of the style as Montaigne and Lamb, Leigh Hunt and Hazlitt; they are rather in the nature of reviews; and the only works we can call to mind to which they can be adequately compared are the Essays of Lord Macaulay, and they are as far above them in depth of thought and intensity of expression as they are in impartiality of statement and fairness of treatment. It is sufficient to study side by side the different manner in which the two writers have treated Dr. Johnson and his biographer, to properly realise the truth of this.

Under the date of October 28th, 1830, Carlyle has this entry in his diary: "Written a strange piece on Clothes. Know not what will come of it." And Mrs. Carlyle, on reading the manuscript, laid it down with the remark, "My dear, this is a work of genius."[1]

Eight years later, after many vicissitudes, many disappointments, deducible principally from the short-sightedness of the critics and the want of confidence of the booksellers, the "Sartor Resartus," one of the most inspired and remarkable works in the English language, got itself published.

[1] "Being regarded," says Mr. Hodge, "as a piece of incomprehensible jargon by several publishing firms, he (Carlyle) was forced to issue it piecemeal in *Frazer's Magazine*, where it appeared in 1833-4, and was not published separately for some time thereafter."

Ostensibly a review of a book by one Professor Diogenes Teufelsdröeckh, it masks, under an assumed treatise on "Clothes: Their Use and Origin," the transcendental philosophy of Fichte, by which we are to consider all outward things, even man himself, as so many symbols or clothes under which is concealed "the divine idea." Taking this as the mainspring of the work, Carlyle builds round it another section, in which he fulminates with the thunder of his irony against all kinds of shams and hypocrisy, which are merely so many outer garments, and which, being done away with, leave the *man* in his original poverty and nakedness. In places the work rises to epic heights, particularly such as the chapter entitled "The Everlasting No"; and throughout it is notable for the tone of tremendous earnestness which runs unbroken through it.

Carlyle so thoroughly believes in himself and in everything he asserts that he cannot fail to carry his readers with him, even though he may lead them through what they cannot always appreciate, and though he shows them what they cannot entirely understand. For nothing so wins the hearts of men or touches their imagination as singleness of purpose and earnestness of aim. With a wealth of singular expressions, of telling epithets, and of

strangely coined words, he produces effects and images never before quickened by the hand of so potent a wizard.

As is not astonishing, when we remember the fate of "Paradise Lost" and "Kubla Khan," the "Sartor Resartus" excited universal disapprobation; for a writer to succeed, he must not be beyond the comprehension of his readers. In course of time, however, a purpose was discovered in this quaint garb; it was apprehended that there was a metaphorical significance in the theory of old clothes. Vestiges of the flashing irony of Swift were to be found hidden under the more metaphysical utterances of Goethe. The "Tale of a Tub" seemed to be in a way linked with "Wilhelm Meister," and finally the world discovered that "Sartor Resartus" was a wonderful creation, and Carlyle discovered himself to be a famous man.

It is characteristic of him that he should, in solemn meditation before the study fire at Craigenputtoch, or in thoughtful abstraction on a pony's back, riding over the bleak moors around his little cottage, have produced such a result as that of "The Patcher Repatched."

The book can be adequately compared with no other work in the language, for it is unique; but for pungent irony, for direct and telling satire, it

approaches, as we have hinted, Swift's "Tale of a Tub," to which, however, it is immeasurably superior by reason of its decency of detail and earnestness of endeavour. Indeed it is in these attributes that its author chiefly differs from Swift. For unlike him, he is never savage for the mere sake of savagery, and he is never foul and indecent. Where Carlyle is bitter, it is with the bitterness of sorrow rather than the bitterness of rage. He does not point the degradation of man to shew that he hates him for it, so much as to make the man hate his own low and trivial nature. There is perhaps an equal force in the castigations of both writers, but Carlyle is infinitely more tender and immeasurably more pitying.

In the "quality of verbal fitness, this power of so charging a phrase with energy and colour as to make it convey the emotion of the writer at the instant of inspiration," Carlyle has an analogy to Cyril Tourneur, of whom these words are enunciated by Mr. Henley. He strikes us as being the most earnest of all writers, but, like most reformers, he often exaggerated what he would criticise in order to attract his reader's attention, and that he might the better enforce his own opinions. He is, above all, a great artist; for whoever does what he has to do to the best of his ability, is, at

least *as far as he himself is concerned*, a great artist.

There are three aspects under which we must investigate the possibilities of Carlyle, if we would be accurately informed of his work and character. We must look upon him as historian, as politician, and as lecturer or *historian by word of mouth*.

Under the first heading it will not be without some difficulty that we settle his claims.

Carlyle himself calls history "Philosophy teaching by Experience;" and under this banner he led his readers to an entirely new conception of what the record of facts ended and done with, ought to be.

It was not surprising that those who had revelled in the "luminous page" of Gibbon, those who had been content with the dull mediocrity of Robertson, who had since received with avidity the falsified facts and magnificent periods of Macaulay, should be startled by the flashes of lightning, the winged words, the peals of cathartic thunder which rolled with increasing force as the history of the French Revolution gradually unfolded its powers and its splendours to them.

Carlyle's manner is as variable as the feelings and opinions of the people he so ably treats of; at one time so minute that not a button on a coat or a scar on a face escapes him, at others telling the

history of an event in a sentence, or describing the character of a man by a word.

To those who would know all the details of the French Revolution, who would follow every act chronologically, or assign to every circumstance a date,[1] Carlyle's history will be insufficient; but to those who wish to be imbued with the very spirit of the time, and who would see the actual scenes taking place before their eyes, who would be among the crowd who rush "with a sound terrible and absolutely like thunder" from the death-bed of Louis "the unforgotten," and who would really see the smoke and hear the rattle of the "whiff of Grapeshot" which ended the Revolution—to these Carlyle's great work will prove history in its widest and best sense.

In places his power of description is well-nigh unparalleled, and he dashes off a picture with the certainty of Turner, but also with as much pains.

[1] Notwithstanding this, it is marvellous, in comparing Carlyle's great work with the contemporary memoirs, such as Campan's and Weber's, how amid that riot of words with which the historian has shrouded the staple of his argument, there is to be found the most exact resemblance in the accounts, not only of the great deeds, but also of the smallest events of the Revolution; there is noticeable a most conscientious verisimilitude, which in reality makes the work no less accurate as a history than great as a piece of literary art.

If we compare the taking of the Bastille with the Battle of Sedgemoor, we shall be able to estimate the relative value of the work, and we may gain some insight into the methods that severally produced effects of so entirely an opposite character. Carlyle is the Géricault of literature, Macaulay its David.

The "French Revolution"[1] was published in 1837, and marks an era in Carlyle's life. It circles continually round the old text that "the wages of sin is death;" and the writer's influence was spread broadcast among those who troubled themselves to seriously consider what analogy the present time had to that fearful final decade of the eighteenth century.

It is, as Emerson has happily termed it, Carlyle's "stereoscopic imagination" which so ably detaches the salient points of a picture from the background, and concentrates every energy on the particular point to which he wishes the mind of the reader to be drawn.

Magnificent as are the epithets with which he has so plentifully besprinkled the book, and for which reason Robespierre will ever be "sea-

[1] Its influence is particularly noticeable in Ruskin and Browning, and Dickens was an ardent admirer of the book, and its influence, as he himself notes in the preface, is apparent throughout the pages of "A Tale of Two Cities."

green," Mirabeau, always "swart, burley-headed," and Lafayette ever "Scipio Americanus," yet this very characteristic has given him an opportunity for often unfairly blackening the characters of those he dislikes, and adding an adventitious glory to those he admires; for epithets are the satellites of partiality.[1]

The "Taking of the Bastille" is the concentrated essence of the whole work; it is but the realised type of the destruction of the old order and of all such institutions. In this alone lies its terrific significance. In treatment it is one of the most perfect examples of Carlyle's style. Such sign-posts of his manner and intention as the unforeseen coming together of "Georget of the Marine Service" and the "King of Siam's cannon," such instances of his power of word-painting as when he notes "How the great Bastille clock ticks (inaudible) in its inner court there, at its ease, hour after hour, as if nothing special for it or the world were passing!" or when he draws the living picture

[1] It is generally known that the first volume of the "French Revolution" in MS. had been lent to a Mrs. Taylor through the kindness of a friend of Carlyle's, and that her maid burnt it for waste paper. Carlyle, with little more than a murmur, sat down and wrote the whole over again. One's mind naturally reverts to the somewhat similar accident which occurred to Newton, which was borne with equal fortitude.

of the old De Launay, "sitting, from the first, with lighted taper, within arms-length of the powder magazine, motionless, like old Roman Senator or bronze lampholder, coldly apprising Thuriot, and all men, by a slight motion of his eye, what his resolution was," strike the keynote of this new conception of history which will peal loud and long through the ages.

In 1845 a book, scarcely less remarkable in its way than the "French Revolution," was published. This was "Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches, with Elucidations." Hardly had it appeared before the waves of controversy, which always surge round any remarkable opposition to public prejudice, burst with angry vehemence upon it. Some, it is true, regarded it as a piece of tardy literary justice; others, refusing to upset their preconceived judgment of the man Oliver, looked upon it as an absurd attempt to whitewash an atrocious character.

In fact few historical personalities have been regarded with so much varied interest of one sort and another as that of the Protector; not many men have had so many detractors and so much individual praise. That the former constituted a large and influential majority irritated a man like Carlyle, and he set himself to work to minimise, if

not to entirely eradicate, what he considered to be a great historical injustice.

The amount of labour he went through, the unremitting toil of investigation into every little detail that could throw a fresh light on the much-debated character of Cromwell, is as characteristic of the man as is his half-humorous complaint at the amount of his own labours, uttered when they were over, and not till then. "The authentic utterances of the man Oliver himself," he says in his preface, "I have gathered from far and near; fished them up from the foul Lethean quagmires where they lay buried. I have washed, or endeavoured to wash, them clean from foreign stupidities—such a job of buck-washing as I do not long to repeat."

The book is a remarkable attempt to show us the true lineaments of the "Great Usurper" washed clean, as its author testifies, from the mud of false accusation which had been so largely and unceasingly thrown upon them, and it is in the main a successful attempt. But preconceived opinions are so powerful that advocacy often only tends to strengthen them, though that advocacy be ever so powerful or ever so just. Apart, however, from its mere controversial aspect, the work is singularly valuable as a piece of authentic historical biography;

and what are modestly called elucidations, are, in reality, pictures in word-painting, which are sometimes hardly to be equalled in any other of Carlyle's books; notably the account of the Victory of Dunbar, and of the Protector's death on its anniversary.

Cromwell's character was in every way a congenial subject, and Carlyle has not failed to treat it as such. He saw in it, as all must see, whether they be partisans or not, a striking example of success achieved by a man's own energy and perseverance; he perceived in Cromwell the archetype of all self-made men. The Protector was thus a hero after his own heart, added to which was the conviction inspired in his mind, it is said, by his mother, that English historians had done but scant justice to the memory of the great man. That in this labour of love Carlyle should have encountered many opponents is not surprising. As Matthew of Paris has said: "The case of historical writers is hard, for if they tell the truth they provoke man, and if what is false, they offend God."

The reason why Carlyle undertook the other great historical work with which his fame is connected, is as characteristic as is his partisanship of Cromwell. It was because Frederick, called the Great, "managed not to be a liar and a charlatan,

as his century was." The subject was undoubtedly impressive and engrossing. As a type the King of Prussia stands forth from a background of mediocrity in company with Napoleon and Cromwell; he is as typical of the man of action of the eighteenth century as Goethe is of the man of thought. But the labour was more than colossal. When we consider that two thick volumes only bring us to the threshold of Frederick's reign; when we remember the time and care expended over collecting materials; the visits paid to all the chief battlefields, Leuthen, Zorndorf, Molwitz and Liegnitz, and to other spots innumerable, connected with the warrior's life; the room fitted up with a collection of over 2000 volumes, besides portraits and drawings[1] wholly referring to this period, one can hardly imagine how a man of Carlyle's temperament, given to fits of despondency and dissatisfaction, could have persevered to the end with such a work, did we not also recollect the indomitable will

[1] Speaking of his method of work, he told Sir Gavan Duffy that "it was his habit to paste on a screen in his workroom engraved portraits, when no better could be had, of the people he was then writing about. It kept the image of the man steadily in view, and one must have a clear image of him to the mind before it was in the least possible to make him to be seen by the reader."—"*Conversations with Carlyle.*"

which recorded the French Revolution, and advocated the claims of Cromwell.

But there were times when even this will seemed ready to bend under the immensity of the labour. Carlyle speaks of the work as "a task that I cannot do, that generally seems to me not worth doing, and that yet must be done. No job approaching to it in ugliness was ever cut out for me; nor had I any motive to go on, except the sad negative one, 'Shall we be beaten in our old days?' No satisfaction in it at all; only labour and sorrow." "What had I to do with your Frederick?" he asked on another occasion of Varnhagen Von Ense, and he was certainly not the only person who asked that question. One is irresistibly reminded of the groans of old Burton of the "Melancholy," when he personates the objectors to his work and says:

"This is a thinge of meere industrie; a collection without wit or invention; a very toy. So men are valued. Their labours vilified by fellowes of no worth themselves, as things of nought; who could not have done as much?"

But Carlyle might have remembered while he querulously bemoaned his fate that his task was a self-imposed one, and much of it superfluous. It has been called his crowning work; this is hardly

an accurate implication except in point of date, for it has neither the epic grandeur of the "French Revolution," the originality of the "Sartor Resartus," or the finished drawing and perfect colouring which go to make up the portrait of "Oliver Cromwell."

It is mosaically unequal, here falling into all but unintelligible jargon, as in the latter part of the scene describing the death-bed of Frederick William I., there rising to heights of unequalled word-painting, as in the immortal portrait of Frederick II.

The mannerisms which have caused a new style to be initiated in English prose—the Carlylian—and which disfigured parts of the "French Revolution," are accentuated to such an extent in the "History of Frederick" that, as has been remarked, the work in places seems to be written in a peculiar sort of shorthand.

It is probable that few persons have read through all Carlyle has to say of the King and his surroundings; it is still more possible that those who have done so have long before the end become as heartily tired of it as the author was himself. As history it is too verbose; as mere literature it is too historical, and it will ever remain one of the really great unreadable books of the English language.

During the eight years which elapsed between the publication of the "French Revolution" and the appearance of "Oliver Cromwell," Carlyle was engaged in a task which, although not by any means unsuccessful, yet seems to have been sufficiently uncongenial—the delivery of courses of lectures on various subjects. Mrs. Carlyle, at the suggestion of her friend, Miss Wilson, seems to have initiated the idea and to have carried out all the necessary arrangements. The first course (which proved a success) was on German literature, a theme not only thoroughly understood by the lecturer but exceedingly interesting to the man; and Caroline Fox has told how "his manner is very quiet, but he speaks like one tremendously convinced of what he utters, and who has much in him that is unutterable." The learned Bunsen says of the lectures that "they are very striking, rugged thoughts, not ready made up for any political or religious system; thrown at people's heads; by which most of his audience are sadly startled;" and Leigh Hunt, an entirely opposite character, testifies to the delight and interest he felt in them.

This first course of lectures was followed by two series, one on "The History of Literature," the other on "The Revolutions of Modern Europe."

Extracts from the latter have been published by Professor Dowden in the *Nineteenth Century*, and they were somewhat imperfectly reported at the time by Leigh Hunt in the *Examiner*. The fate of the former has been more fortunate, for, with the exception of one grave *lacuna*, they have not long since been brought out under the able editorship of Professor Reay Greene. They owe their perpetuation to the painstaking care of the late Mr. Thomas Chisholm Anstey, who took full reports of each lecture, with the exception of that on French literature, which embraced the literary work of that country from François Rabelais to Jean Jacques Rousseau.

Carlyle divides his subject into four periods, beginning with the vague and misty records of earliest antiquity, and ending with the consummation of literary activity in the superlative genius of Goethe. True to his own initiative suggestion, the lecturer's first object is to come at "what these men thought before he enquires what they *did*."

In his, perhaps, necessarily brief sketch of Greek and Roman literature, he does not seem to speak with that conviction which is generally the hallmark of all his work. It did not require the assertion of the Chelsea sage to inform us that the

Æneid is far inferior to the Iliad, nor does he much improve the truism by telling us that he himself thought so. What, however, could adequately be said in two pages on Herodotus, Carlyle has said; and he admires in him "that spirit of order which has constituted him the prose poet of his country;" while of Tacitus he seems to have formulated opinions which are both just and discriminating. "He stood," says Carlyle in a fine figure,—"he stood like a Colossus at the edge of a dark night, and he sees all events hurrying past him, and plunging he knows not where."

What are called the works of Homer, following the supposition of the German Wolff, he considers to have been the production of several authors, and he produces a curiously apposite analogy between their fate and that of the "Robin Hood Ballads."

Æschylus he defines as a "*truly gigantic man*, one of the largest characters ever known." He notes, too, that "striving after effect" which is the key-note of Euripides' style, but, at the same time, he recognises in him "a man of deep feeling and morality."

Concerning those two streams, the meeting of which was so pregnant of confusion and disaster—Christianity and Paganism—Carlyle deals at some length,

and he ably contrasts the selfish doctrines of the Stoics and the Cynics with the large-minded faith and noble self-abnegation of the Christians. He properly insists on that great secret of Christian polity—the belief in one's self as an instrument in the hands of God, in contradistinction to the popular and purely selfish idea of the Cynics, inherited from the Stoics, that man was above all accidental circumstances, and that good and bad affected him indifferently—quite another thing from the proper self-respect which arises from our conviction of whence we come and to whom we belong.

And so down to the immortal Goethe Carlyle's criticisms, whatever their significance or whatever their extent, are at least characterised by a large-minded appreciation of all that is good and true, by a hatred of all that is mean and false.

As he nears the end of the eighteenth century, he is more at home with his subject as a whole; for which reason the three last lectures are possibly the most luminous and the best, although such great names as Mahomet, Dante, Cervantes, Luther, and Shakespeare call forth isolated bits of criticism which are hardly to be surpassed for soundness of judgment or energy of treatment. Thus of Luther he says, "He was a man of the largest intellect

and learning born in that century, put down by nature, as it seemed, for the lowest sphere of life, to beat out a little lead ore in his capacity of miner, but it was not so appointed." In Shakespeare he sees "a man in whom that era (the era of Elizabeth), as well as other eras, have found a voice—one who gives utterance to many things silent before him, and worthy to be called the spokesman of our nation!" Of Goethe he has a beautiful metaphor. "Goethe," he says, "was a strong man, as strong as the mountain rocks, but as soft as the green sward upon the rocks, and, like them, continually bright and sun-beshone."

The last series of lectures which Carlyle gave are far the best known, because in their incorporated book form they have become a standard work; we mean those on "Heroes and Hero Worship."

What scheme the lecturer had formed on this subject, he tells us himself in his opening words: "We have undertaken to discourse here for a little on great men, their manner of appearance in our world's business," he says, "how they have shaped themselves in the world's history, what ideas men formed of them, what work they did."

The six lectures were divided into a study and estimate of the value and influence of the hero

considered as divinity, prophet, poet, priest, man of letters, and king.

The ground covered, as may be supposed, is the flooring of all the ages; the men treated of, the pre-eminently great ones of all times; Mahomet, Dante, Shakespeare, Luther, Knox, Johnson, Rousseau, Burns, Cromwell, and Napoleon. What a wealth of information and imagery, critical acumen and appreciation is included in these lectures, only those who are acquainted with Carlyle's capacity of judgment and force of reasoning can well estimate. "We cannot look, however imperfectly, upon a great man without gaining something by him," he says; and it would be idle to reiterate how much can be gained from a careful investigation into what Carlyle himself has here to say of the great ones he treats of, from Mahomet to Napoleon.

His matter is, however, more open to exception. He lays it down as a fundamental law, that when a great man is wanted, he appears. To harmonize the influence of the individual with general laws was not a problem that he troubled himself to investigate or solve. Then again, by the nature of the work, he could hardly avoid treating his heroes individually, and such worship is by the nature of itself apt to be intolerant. But

the work remains, when all is said and done, a remarkable effort of genius; and a small-sized volume might be made up of a collection of the "wise saws and modern instances" with which it is filled.

To speak seriously of Carlyle as a politician is out of the question. His contempt for contemporary legislators of all persuasions was too pronounced to allow him to take his stand for any length of time beneath the banners of either Radicalism, Democracy, or Toryism. The fact is, he loved the more isolated post of prophet, and had he been endowed in a like degree with the same noble philosophy and toleration as the great Seer of Judah, he might have been regarded as the Jeremiah of the Nineteenth Century; for he was possessed of the same earnestness, the same noble endeavour, the same god-given wish for the amelioration of his fellowmen.

In much of his literary work he acted the part of the sign-post, directing the way to the betterment of the people, but in his so-called political works he was more ready to point out abuses than to suggest remedies—thinking, perhaps, that an ill recognised is already half-rectified.

What is best in his political utterances will be found in "Past and Present," in "Chartism," and in his "Latter-day Pamphlets"; what is least important

is incorporated in "Shooting Niagara," and, to a certain degree, in his essays on the "State of Irish Affairs.'

Although in all these works the same note is touched again and again *i.e.* his entire want of faith in the methods for the amelioration of the people's condition undertaken by the social reformers of the day, yet all have beyond the well-meaningness of their intention, a large literary value; and the utterances of a man of such a potent personality as Carlyle could hardly fail to excite a widespread interest, although that interest was as often as not turned into ridicule by the nature of his opinions and his manner of enunciating them. He took for his text, that "all is vanity," and he acted up to it and wrote upon it all his life. The laughter of the fools was more to him as "the thorns crackling under the pot," than to any since Solomon. "Man by the nature of him is a great owl," he once wrote, and where he does not so phrase it one has no difficulty in telling that he still thinks it. He was not so much a good hater as an "uncompromising castigator"; he pitied too much to hate, and despised too much to love, and the isolated position in which he was thus left is in a great way responsible for the reasons he held and the opinions he ventilated.

"The public," he said in a characteristic criticism of his own time, "had become a gigantic jackass, literature a glittering lie; science was groping aimlessly amidst the dry, dead clatter of the machinery by which it means the universe; art wielding a feeble, watery pencil; history stumbling over dry bones in a valley no longer of vision; philosophy lisping and battling exploded absurdities mixed with new nonsense about the infinite, the absolute, and the eternal." And his estimate of the men who had to meet these crises was not more hopeful.

With a "Life of John Sterling," written in 1851, to do more justice to its subject than he thought Hare had succeeded in effecting in his biography; and a history of the early kings of Norway, showing much of his old capacity and fire, Carlyle's literary life closes.

As a man, Carlyle was one of that hard-working, honest, albeit sometimes querulous, band which does a good deal of superfluous blushing for other people, and is continually mourning beyond most persons "over the sinfulness of little sins." A hater of shams and *simulacra*, like many men he seemed to be their most intolerant enemy, simply because he was always telling the world so. He has compared Goethe to a rock covered with moss; he

himself has no small resemblance to the rock—without the moss.

Rough and morose as he oftenest seemed, yet he had in him to a large extent that attribute without which few men can attain what Dr. Johnson calls "civil greatness," we mean humour. It was not the bubbling, mirthful humour of Scott; it was not the sententious Olympian wit of Johnson; it was not the sardonic, satirical humour of Swift; it was essentially the "humour of Carlyle"; and of its sort, it suited the rugged, imperfect nature it informed. It was, too, more noticeable in the man himself than in his works, although at times flashes of it penetrate the gloom that so often envelopes the latter. Very unfortunately for his critical acumen, he held poetry of no account, at least poetry that was not of a didactic nature; were its votaries not utilitarians he would have nothing of them; and though in his criticisms on such giants as Dante, Shakespeare and Æschylus, this does not appear at first sight to be the case, yet if we look deeper we shall find that his admiration for them arises primarily from the fact that, though more or less unconsciously, they were all great moral teachers and great social reformers.

Of his writings we need hardly say more here. His style will probably always be a stumbling-

block to the many, and not a little surprising to the few;[1] and though what Macaulay says of Bentham may not, with some reservation, inaptly be applied to him, that "he has had blind flatterers and blind detractors—flatterers who could see nothing but perfection in his style, detractors who could see nothing but nonsense in his matter"—yet he remains one of the chief among those who, while doubting the efficiency of their efforts, have nobly attempted the regeneration of their fellowmen.

[1] Macaulay once wrote of one of his articles, "As to Carlyle, he might as well write in Irving's unknown tongues at once." No better description of Carlyle's peculiar and bizarre methods of writing has been given than that which Mr. George Meredith affords us in a chapter of "Beauchamp's Career." "A style," he says, "resembling either early architecture or utter dilapidation, so loose and rough it seemed; a wind-in-the-orchard style, that tumbled down here and there an appreciable fruit with uncouth bluster; sentences without commencements running to abrupt endings and smoke, like waves against a sea-wall, learned dictionary words giving a hand to street slang, and accents falling on them haphazard, like slant rays from driving clouds; all the pages in a breeze, the whole book producing a kind of electrical agitation in the mind and the joints."

NOTE ON

"WOTTON REINFRED."

So great an admiration have we for Thomas Carlyle that it is with pain we read his so-called novel, "Wotton Reinfred," and with some reluctance that we here say a few words as an appendix to what we have formulated about the man and his writings, concerning it.

A very casual glance by the most superficial of readers will show that Carlyle wanted almost every attribute necessary to make a good novelist, and the man who could inform the French Revolution with a new life, and give immortality to the opinions of Herr Teufelsdröeckh, has written what has been generously termed a novel, as if he believed in Faraday's definition of the writing of such a work: that it was "to make any means produce an end." Dr. Johnson calls a novelist an "innovator" or "assertor of novelties," and in this connection Carlyle fully deserves the name, but in no other.

"Wotton Reinfred" is as full of faults as an egg is of meat, to use an ancient simile; from bad

English to an immoral delight in mysticism, as Mr. Henley would say. It is so dull that one hardly notices the entire absence of anything like plot. We cannot even call Wotton Reinfred himself the hero, although he seems, for some other reason than the fact of his name serving as the title to the book, to merit in a way that distinction. The only really interesting point about him is the flavour, sufficiently faint it is true, of autobiography which in the earlier part of the book pervades him. But his ridiculous embarrassment on first meeting Jane Montague is as unlife-like as it is uncalled for; and we cannot help feeling that the description of his state of mind on first seeing her is rather that of a man who has gone too long without his dinner than of a person who is first introduced to one he loves. Wotton Reinfred's character is as inconsistent as it is dull, and in his hypochondriacal rhapsodies his prototype Werther is as apparent as is the influence of the German school throughout the entire tale. The waiter at the inn where Wotton and his friend stay, speaks like a Frenchman who has just mastered the elementary forms of English conversation. The House of the Wold, with its innumerable inmates, is like the retreat of Boccacio's men and women, where, instead of Italy, we have Wales, and in place of the

delight produced by beautiful and witty tales we are mystified by abstruse propositions and wearied by interminable arguments.

"Wotton Reinfred" is like a picture seen through a dusty glass; it is all in shade. Everyone talks alike; all the men are prigs, and all the women blues—there is no contrast whatever. The mystic Dalbrook is like the atrabiliar philosopher Burridge; Maurice is like Wotton; Jane similar to Elizabeth. Bernard's character is well drawn in a single line: "That he wished a thing to be true was ever with him a strong persuasion of its truths," and there are as many aphorisms enunciated in the book as would set some modern novelists going for years; what Maurice says of Homer's teaching and of Shakespeare's is not the least of them worthy of repetition. "They taught us to know the world, and yet to love it." But such isolated bits of criticism or philosophy do not make a successful novel, and Carlyle shows in every line of "Wotton Reinfred" that he was a mere tyro at such work.

In a word, the book reads like a bad German tale indifferently translated. That Carlyle never published it is not surprising. Had he been ill-advised enough to have done so, we may well be sure, that though his want of experience in this

particular branch of literature might not have caused him to see any defects in the matter, yet his love of accuracy and literary perfection would certainly have induced him to largely revise the style.

Carlyle is sufficiently great without requiring the adventitious glory of a successful novelist to be added to his other distinctions, nor can we believe that his fame will suffer any diminution from such a failure. We can only grieve over the fatuity of those who were responsible for the republishing of a deservedly forgotten work.

Walter Savage Landor,

DRAMATIST.

"Come back in sleep, for in the life
Where thou art not
We find none like thee. Time and Strife
And the world's lot

"Move thee no more; but love at least
And reverent heart
May move thee, royal and released,
Soul, as thou art."

—*Swinburne.*

AMONG writers of eminence we shall now and again find certain individuals whose personality breaks through the surrounding bulwarks of their literary creation, and makes these, as it were, subservient to it, or, in other words, causes the unspoken mind to domineer over the uttered word.

Such a character is not unusual, and when it appears it nearly always happens that the creations of the mind are almost entirely superseded by the force of the personal attributes. But it is rarer to find both the individuality of the man and the

character of his writings partaking of an almost equal amount of authority and power; yet it is by no means unprecedented, and one of its best and most typical examples is that of the "unsubduable old Roman," as Carlyle called him—Walter Savage Landor.

Landor holds a peculiarly anomalous position among English writers. Working for a few chosen ones, and, as has been remarked, chiefly for himself, he was tied by none of the unities by which more dependent men have found themselves shackled, and in consequence he is one of those intellectual giants who are so often rendered powerless by the very weight of their own personality.

The "Olympian Schoolboy," although, perhaps, not quite just in its implication, still has truth enough (for epithets as well as epigrams are "at best half-truths that look like whole ones") to describe sufficiently his literary tendency, and what Mr. Henley cleverly calls a "monumental skittishness" is the badge of all his work. His individuality was too great to allow him always to be a faultless artist, and so it is not surprising that in his chief work, a journey through which has been described as "the adventure of seven volumes, which are seven valleys of dry bones," there is very much that is uninteresting, much that is tiresome,

and much that is even mediocre. But when Landor is at his best, not many are so perfect as he, and if he is not always so good as the few who can be compared to him, he is on occasion much better. It has been objected that all his characters are too much after one model, and that a Landorian model,[1] but only an imperfect knowledge of the "Conversations" would prompt such a verdict. When Hannibal receives the dying words of Marcellus, we feel almost inclined to say with the Carthaginian, "What else has the world in it?" so pathetic seems the end of the noble warrior! "How suddenly," exclaims the agonising Marcellus, "may the most powerful be in the situation of the most helpless," and he adds a little further on, "We feel ourselves the most exempt from affliction when we relieve it, although we are then the most conscious that it may befall us." How perfectly, too, has Landor caught the relations of the church and court of France in the conversation between "Louis XIV. and Father La Chaise," when the young King confesses the greatest of crimes and his confessor imposes the slightest of

[1] Carlyle said the "Conversations" were all more or less Landor, but acknowledged that there were fine touches of character in his statesmen and poets which Wilson or Lockhart could not match.—"*Conversations with Duffy.*"

penances. How just are his strictures on Charles I. in the conversation in which Cromwell tries to justify himself and his conduct. "Charles," says Cromwell, "was always more to be dreaded by his friends than by his enemies." Who has not shuddered with the Princess Dashkof when she listens with Catherine of Russia to the murder of Peter, and hears the blood dripping through the bedclothes? How perfectly characteristic is the Empress's reply to the Princess's remark, that Europe may be more easily subjugated than duped. "She shall be both, God willing," exclaims Catherine. Is there anything in literature more touching than Landor's treatment of Anne Boleyn, when Henry comes disguised as a yeoman to see her? And is there not something very pathetic in her womanly desire once more to see the young Elizabeth? "Could I, could I kiss her but once again! it would comfort my heart, or break it."

How charming to walk with Epicurus, and talk love and philosophy with Leontian and Ternissa; the very air seems to breathe the balmy atmosphere of sunny Italy, and while they wander among violet beds and shady groves, it seems a land where "it is always afternoon." What more beautiful than the conversation between Leofric and Godiva? How gigantic the satire in that

between Peter the Great and Alexis. How true, if a little sententious, is this aphorism of Richard Hooker when he talks of religion and philosophy with Lord Bacon: "Wisdom consisteth not in knowing many things, nor even in knowing them thoroughly; but in choosing and in following what conduces the most certainly to our lasting happiness and true glory. And this wisdom, my Lord of Verulam, cometh from above."

But not merely in these pictorial and imaginative effects do the "Conversations" appeal to us; and in the remarks of Southey with Landor himself we shall find an estimate of Milton as solid, and an acumen as perfect, as any criticism on the poet has yet produced. How acute, too, is Landor's perception of Milton's grandeur in another place, his conversation with the Abbé Délille, and what a perfect analogy he draws between the sublimity of the poet and the rugged majesty of the Alps. Quite the gem it seems to be of the whole work. "Milton," says Délille, "is, indeed, extremely difficult to translate; for however noble and majestic, he is sometimes heavy, and often rough and unequal." "Dear Abbé," replies Landor, "porphyry is heavy, gold is heavier; Ossa and Olympus are rough and unequal; the steppes of Tartary, though high, are of uniform elevation; there is not a rock,

nor a birch, nor a cytisus, nor an arbutus upon them great enough to shelter a new dropped lamb. Level the Alps one with another, and where is their sublimity? Raise up the Vale of Tempe to the downs above, and where are those sylvan creeks and harbours in which the imagination watches while the soul reposes, those recesses in which the gods partook the weaknesses of mortals, and mortals the enjoyments of the gods?"

This is criticism, and what is much more, eloquent criticism: such eloquence, indeed, as few besides Landor have written. Nor is his estimate of Voltaire's remarks on Shakespeare less poignant. He speaks of him as a "woodpecker sticking to an old tree, in order that he may pick out the rotten pieces, and even then," says our author, "he has brought home but scanty sustenance to his starveling nest."

Landor's criticism was as extensive as it was forcible, and the "Conversations" alone bear witness to an amount of book-learning and synthetical skill which, had the author done nothing else, would, under any circumstances, have claimed our admiration. In the vastness of his subject he has covered ground which, in the ordinary run of things, would have provided life work for many men.

From Plato to Porson, from Hannibal to Hume,

from Seneca to Southey, he has treated of them all, sovereigns, statesmen, men of letters, and men of science, of all ages and of all types. That he has been accused of marking so many of them with his own individuality is not astonishing, that he should in certain instances have deserved the accusation is not less surprising. Were it not an acknowledged fact, according to Carlyle, that "biography is by nature the most universally profitable, universally pleasant of all things, especially biography of distinguished individuals," it might also be a matter of wonder that Landor did not feel the strain of writing a work of the same continuity as the "Imaginary Conversations," for here, indeed, is biography in the truest sense of the word. It is for this biographical reason that the work has such an indisputable value, for "we cannot look, however imperfectly, upon a great man, without gaining something by him," and it is the history of the better part of the world that we touch when we lay our hands on this work.

Landor is, like better men before and since, least trustworthy when he gets on political matters, especially contemporary politics. It was such a sore subject with him that it would have been difficult, perhaps impossible, to have avoided venturing on the delicate ground of party strife.

In doing so he was bearing Shelley and Leigh Hunt company. All men have their prejudices; they are to a man's character what the lights and shadows are to his portrait; but not many have enforced them on other people with the sledge-hammer-like persistence of Landor. His hatred for Castlereigh and Canning was a kind of mania, and the unhappy objects of his wrath are held up to his sneers and sarcasms in a thousand guises. Even in such an unlikely place as the conversation between Epicurus and Ternissa, there are two long passages, both of them violent attacks on Canning. In the conversation between Demosthenes and Eubulides, the statesman figures under the disguise of Anædestatos, a demagogue with a questionable predilection for appropriating the public funds; an implication, however, as uncalled for as it is untrue; and in Canning's conversation with Pitt, the whole object of the piece seems to be the making of the former ridiculous and abhorrent.

Landor was, like Dr. Johnson, "a good hater"; he had also the great lexicographer's (as dear Miss Betty in "Cranford" used to call him) tenacity of purpose and intolerance of opinion. A grand old pagan he has well been called, for he was too good a man for a world which has no moral laws and

too wilful a man for one that has. He hated anything like opposition, and the Boythorn of "Bleak House" is in every characteristic the Landor of Llanthony. He would fulminate the most fearful threats while fondling a pet, and the tale of his having, when abroad, in a fit of passion, thrown his man-cook out of the window, immediately after exclaiming, "Good God! I forgot the violets," does not seem to be founded on any apocryphal basis. The fact was that, as I. Disraeli somewhere says: "The modes of life of a man of genius, often tinctured by eccentricity and enthusiasm, maintain an eternal conflict with the monotonous and imitative habits of society, as society is carried on in a great metropolis, where men are necessarily alike, and in perpetual intercourse shaping themselves to one another."

As we frequently recognise the inherent wickedness of a man by the few acts of goodness which he has perpetrated, so we may often see the real greatness of a writer by his few defects. These have been here sufficiently pointed out (at best an ungracious task) to enable the student of Landor to recognise the points which really constituted the great man in him.

The "Conversations" is his monumental work, but the other productions of his pen are so nearly

akin in form and intention to them, that all he did in prose may be classed under the dramatic heading.

The chief of these other books is undoubtedly "Pericles and Aspasia," his longest work. It is written in the form of letters between Aspasia and her friends, chief of whom is Pericles. Into this book Landor has brought together all his antiquarian knowledge, all his jewels of oratory and imagery, all his patriot-like love for the earlier and more glorious Greece; throughout this noble work the characters have a continuity, and are sustained with a vigour which is surpassed by their author in none of his other books. Pericles is always thoughtful and just; Aspasia ever noble and womanly.

It is hardly to be wondered at that Landor, who wrote out of his head, and did not verify his work by the authorities he had previously been acquainted with, should have fallen into error and anachronism, but as "he did not trouble himself about considerations of this kind, observing, rightly enough, that dialogue was not history, and that in a work of imagination some liberties might legitimately be taken with fact," he fell through this conclusion into a graver fault, and in loading his work

with learned disquisitions and abstruse propositions, he puzzled the general reader without benefiting the student. It is a sufficient proof of his charm of manner that, in spite of these defects, "Pericles and Aspasia" still remains an engrossing book, from the moment when the Grecian beauty first meets the great General at a performance of "The Prometheus Bound," to where it so finely ends with Pericles' dying opinions of life, which had sometimes seemed as of but a moment's length to him, "at another time, as if centuries had passed within it; for within it have existed the greater part of those who, since the origin of the world, have been the luminaries of the human race."

To "Pericles and Aspasia" Landor appended two long epilogues: one literary, which, for the time, got lost through the carelessness of an American gentleman (giving Landor an opportunity of writing a characteristic allusion, and of practically shutting his doors henceforth to any of that nation): and the other political, which, under cover of treating of Athenian legislation, gives the author's own ideas on modern politics, and somewhat inappropriately enunciates his opinions on the desirability of Church and State Reform in England and Ireland.

The first part of that remarkable trilogy of

books which appeared between 1834 and 1837, and of which "Pericles and Aspasia" formed the second part, was "The Citation and Examination of William Shakespeare for Deer-stealing," a book, which, according to the epigram of Charles Lamb, "only two men could have written—the man who did write it, or he of whom it was written." Like all exaggerated praise, it is not improbable that this has done the book some little harm by raising expectations which are not destined to be adequately realised.

The fact is, that Landor's peculiar genius did not lend itself sufficiently to the treatment of the lighter moods (for which reason it is that the more playful sallies in the conversation between Epicurus and Ternissa are the worser part of that production), and "where, in painting the humours of a rich and massive nature, Landor was incomparable; he had not the light hand which is needed to paint the humours of a fool." If we disregard the temerity (owned by the author in a letter to Southey) of bringing Shakespeare, of whose personality so little is known, upon the scene at all, Landor, from his personal acquaintance with Warwickshire, and especially that part which is so peculiarly associated with the Bard of Avon, seemed particularly fitted to treat of such a theme.

But the wit, from whoever's mouth it issues, is the heavy, elephantine wit of Landor. The satire is in a happier vein, and the words in which Sir Thomas Lucy points out the sacredness of "bucks, swans, and herons," are excellently well chosen. The work, too, is rich, as are all Landor's, whatever else be their faults, in "wise saws and modern instances," of which, as an example, we may give Shakespeare's remark to Sir Thomas Lucy, that "Even bad men are not bad men while they praise the just"; and among the verses interspersed throughout it, that entitled the "Maid's Lament" is well nigh perfection.

The last work of the trilogy, the constituent parts of which were written during the happiest years of Landor's life, when he wandered in the grounds of his own Villa Gherardesca, or through the "citron groves of Fiesole," was "The Pentameron."

Goethe has said, "To finish is not the scholar's care; it is enough if he improves himself by practice," and Landor has sufficiently applied this rule to himself in this work. All circumstances seemed to combine to make it a worthy result. Written on the very spot where the scene of "The Decameron" had partly been laid, it treated of the two writers, with whose work Landor had most

intimate knowledge, and whom he mostly loved, Boccacio and Petrarch. In "The Pentameron," all Landor's power, knowledge of human nature, critical perception, and eloquence are brought into play. It is, perhaps, the most uniformly good of all his works; it is certainly the most beautiful. Whether we linger in memory with the greatest of story-tellers himself, "the most imaginative and creative genius that our Italy, or indeed our world, hath in any age beheld," as Petrarch is made so rightly to call him; whether we think of Laura's lover, and exclaim with him, "Love, O Giovanni, and life itself, are but dreams at best;" or whether we remember the charming Assuntina, who is no child, but for whom there is a place in heaven, or Frate Biagio, the priest, we cannot but recognise that to have made all these the living embodiment of our hopes and fears is the work of true genius.

There are spots on the sun, and "The Pentameron" is disfigured by one or two long and tedious stories with no merit and less point, but all such defects are more than compensated for by the beautiful allegory of Petrarch's dream—a dream of love, and sleep, and death. Mr. Colvin justly considers it "an example, unmatched in literature, of the union of Greek purity of outline with Florentine poignancy of sentiment"; and it indeed shows,

better than any criticism on Landor could do, what a power he possessed to touch as lightly as with a feather, he, who could on occasion smite as with a rod of iron.

There is something very pathetic about the production of this book, for what had been commenced in happiness among his most cherished associations, was only destined to see the light when its author, driven by family dissensions, had returned to his native land and was living a solitary hypochondriac in England.

Like so many great prose writers who have attempted poetry, Landor, though he showed both vigour and versatility, was never destined to rank among England's great poets. He had in his composition neither the love of nature, which helped to make Wordsworth the chief of a school, nor the passionate feelings of Byron; he was no dreamer like Coleridge, nor was he a born poet like Burns. Yet his almost maiden effort was not without merit, and it is no secret that Landor expected great things of it.

An accident suggested the poem, for he found what was afterwards its groundwork in the form of a slight Arabian sketch at the end of a romance which had been lent him by Miss Rose Aylmer.[1]

[1] Immortalised in the beautiful little poem which bears her name.

The plot has been described as "shadowy and chaotic," and in the preface its author terms "Gebir" "the fruit of idleness and ignorance."

As is frequent with Landor, this poem fails in being a perfect work of art from a proper want of continuity, and its best passages have acquired an exaggerated value from the fact of their isolation. But at the same time there are very remarkable instances of fine poetical writing, so fine, indeed, that they may often with propriety be compared with the productions of the greatest masters of English poetry;[1] but the best commentary on the ultimate success of the poem is the fact that the lines on George III. are probably the best known portion of it, from the fact alone that Byron has transcribed them in a note to his "Vision of Judgment."

"Gebir" had, however, one great merit. It stood forth as one of the surest precursors of the revival of English poetry. As a herald, it was not necessary to be of the same sterling merit or

[1] In "Gebir," as in his prose work, Landor shows the intensity of his admiration, and the fierceness of his hate. The lines on George III. are ferocious in their satire, while Napoleon, who is included among the descendants of Tamar, is described as "A mortal man above all mortal praise."

overwhelming grandeur as those which it introduced.

De Quincey, in his amusing way, speaks of himself at the time of its first appearance as being its "one sole purchaser and reader," a title which he found himself bound, soon after, to share with Southey. The anecdote shows how little the work was known, "for," says De Quincey in another place, "had Mr. Landor been read in any extent answering to his merits, he must have become, for the English public, an object of prodigious personal interest."

Although "Gebir," published anonymously in 1798, was written when Landor was only twenty-three years of age, it was not his first poetical attempt, and "The Poems of Walter Savage Landor," which had been published as early as 1795, whether from an increased critical perception in the author, or an almost inevitable dearth of readers, was speedily withdrawn from circulation.

Three years after the appearance of "Gebir," Landor put forth a small pamphlet entitled "Poems from the Arabic and Persian." It was written under the influence of one of Sir William Jones' recent publications of similar work; but this little venture made no stir at the time, and was followed soon after by "Poetry by the Author of 'Gebir.'" Chief among the contents of this latter

volume are the poems called respectively "Chrysaor" and "The Phocæans." The former is probably Landor's finest piece of narrative-writing in blank verse; and it is known what an impression the other made on Wordsworth. By his latter-day poems, the "Hellenics" and the "Heroic Idyls," partly in English and partly in Latin, his poetical work was bounded.

It is probable that Landor's verse will be represented for posterity by the one or two small lyrics which have hardly been surpassed in their style for simplicity of diction and beauty of thought. Among the best of these, that to "Rose Aylmer" is the most widely known; but "Twenty Years Hence," "One Year Ago," and "Sympathy in Sorrow," and above all, his lines, touching beyond expression, to Mary Lamb on her brother's death, are all beautiful examples of his best manner; while this single stanza:—

> "I strove with none; for none was worth my strife.
> Nature I loved, and next to Nature, Art;
> I warmed both hands before the fire of life;
> It sinks, and I am ready to depart,—"

which is prefaced to one of his last works, quite mirrors Landor's life and aims in four lines.

His more particularly dramatic[1] works yet remain to receive some notice. Of them, "Count Julian" holds deservedly the first place. De Quincey calls it "a great conception." "The story," he says, "is wrapt in gigantic mists, and looms upon one like the Grecian fable of the Œdipus." This is high praise indeed, but, although it is not bestowed so partially as at first sight it appears to be, yet many will be inclined to be biassed rather by Charles Lamb's more sober remarks on the play. "I must read again Landor's 'Julian,'" he says in 1815; "I have not read it for some time. I think he must have failed in Roderick (one of the characters in the play), for I remember nothing of him, nor of any distinct character as a character, only fine-sounding passages."

The fact seems to have been that Landor was tied down by his own severe rules; and the result of his theory that the passions in poetry should "go naked like the heroes and the gods," is, that they do not seem always to have been in this natural state, but appear rather to have lost their clothes.

Southey, with his vast knowledge of all things Spanish, gave Landor invaluable help during the

[1] "More particularly," for, as has been remarked before, all his works have the dramatic spirit.

writing of "Count Julian"; it, however, with difficulty found a publisher, and in a moment of passion at the news that Longman had refused it, Landor burnt a tragedy entitled "Ferranti and Guilio," in which, as he said himself, he imagined he had "acquired the right tone of tragedy, and was treading down at heel the shoes of Alfieri."

"Count Julian" abounds in fine passages often more than merely rhetorical, and, as has been observed, is "not poor in solid and profound reflexions upon life." There are in it, too (to use De Quincey's somewhat high-sounding praise, in this case not unmerited), "passages to which, for their solemn grandeur, one raises one's hat as at night in walking under the Coliseum; passages which, for their luxury of loveliness, should be inscribed on the phylacteries of brides, or upon the frescoes of Ionia."

"Count Julian," as is, too, the case with "Gebir," stands an almost solitary exception, however, towards proving Landor a true poet. Had all he has written in verse the beauty, continuity, and clearness of this work, he might have taken his stand at least among the English poets of the second rank; but this was, unfortunately, not the case, and he knew it; for, while he regarded himself as the first of living prose-writers, he acknowledged that

there were better contemporary poets; and when we consider the nature of the man we cannot but feel sure that such an allowance was only made after the most positive proof and the most matured conviction.

The trilogy of "Andrea of Hungary," "Giovanni of Naples" and "Fra Rupert," and the "Siege of Ancona," the last of his complete plays, hardly help to raise Landor in the position of "a great dramatic poet," as Browning in the dedication of "Luria" calls him.

This will possibly not be the verdict of the majority of Landor's readers, because the majority of Landor's readers are worshippers of Landor. Yet it is in reality more than true, for though he treated his subjects in a singularly powerful and dramatic way, "Count Julian" is the only one of his plays that has really any just pretence to be regarded as a perfect dramatic work of art.

His two last works, productions of his old age, bear the curiously bizarre titles of "Last Fruit off an Old Tree," and "Dry Sticks, fagoted by W. S. Landor." They are both a somewhat miscellaneous collection of conversations, letters, epigrams, poems and essays, together with some lampoons, which, in contradiction to his written engagement not to insert, he had printed in the latter book, bringing

him fresh trouble, and obliging him once again to leave England.

Both these works, but more particularly the latter, as was perhaps to be expected when the age of the author is considered, show signs of decaying powers and worn-out vigour. The "Last Fruit" is disfigured by one of those long, nay, almost interminable conversations on grammar and spelling which Landor seems to have elaborated with such painstaking zest. It is the conversation between Landor himself and Archdeacon Hare, and together with the two between Dr. Johnson and Horne, Tooke shows the truth of what De Quincey says in his exceedingly clever and amusing article entitled "Orthographic Mutineers":—"As we are all of us crazy when the wind sits in some particular quarter, let not Mr. Landor be angry with me for suggesting that he is outrageously crazy upon the one solitary subject of spelling." He shows, as readers of the essay are aware, how dangerously near inconsistency Landor often sails, and how unavoidable this is; for it is an acknowledged fact that prejudice, intolerance and error are nearly always closely allied.

To come to the man himself, with all his impetuosity and waywardness, the charm of Landor's manner must have been irresistible, and many are

the evidences which bear witness to the fact. Southey, who had so many opportunities of judging the character of his friend, has left this tribute to his memory—a tribute that has called forth a sneer from Byron:—"Of its author (the author of 'Gebir' and 'Count Julian'), I will only say in this place, that to have obtained his approbation as a poet, and possessed his friendship as a man, will be remembered among the honours of my life, when the petty enmities of this generation will be forgotten, and its ephemeral reputation shall have passed away."

Shelley was no less enthusiastic, at least over one of his productions, "Gebir" (De Quincey seemed unaware of this), which Hogg tells us he would read aloud or to himself with a tiresome pertinacity.

De Quincey, Carlyle, Dickens, and Lamb have all combined in their various ways to render affectionate tribute to "that deep-mouthed Bœtian, Savage Landor," as Byron calls him in "Don Juan." Browning dedicated, as we have seen, his "Luria" to him, and Mr. Swinburne has written one of his most melodious poems to the "old lion's" memory. How lovingly he refers to him!

"I found him whom I shall not find
Till all grief end,

In holiest age our mightiest mind,
Father and friend."

It is given to few to inspire such love among friends[1] or such fear among enemies. When he smote he struck out in front; he would have no hitting a man from behind. He was a satirist, but his satire, though trenchant, was ever kindly. He had prejudices, but when the strife was o'er, he was ever ready to "call a truce to battle." The fact was that there were in him two distinct personalities, one full of pugnacity, always apt to see offence in the least matter; the other of the kindliest and most fatherly character.

He strikes us as a man of great intellectual powers, which, had they had a greater analytical basis, might have placed him in a position to do work far more useful and far more popular, though it could not well have been more enduring or more solid.[2] A link between two literary ages, he

[1] "On the 15th of May I dined," says Emerson, "with Mr. Landor. I found him noble and courteous, living in a cloud of pictures at his Villa Gherardesca, a fine house commanding a beautiful landscape. I had inferred from his books or magnified from some anecdotes, an impression of Achillean wrath—an untamable petulance. I do not know whether the imputations were just or not, but certainly on this May day his courtesy veiled that haughty mind, and he was the most patient and gentle of hosts."—*English Traits.*

[2] "What I write is not written on slate; and no finger,

stands a herculean figure, towering above his contemporaries, and ever as ready to do battle with sham and fraud as Carlyle was to fight the battles later on.

Landor's style has been spoken of as "marmoreally emphatic;" no other epithet could perhaps describe it with an equal felicity. To no one does Buffon's dictum (somewhat erroneously formulated as *le style c'est l'homme*) apply with so great a semblance of truth. His writings were more than most people's the reflex of his mind, and in his own conduct he had himself acted a hundred times the sentiments and propositions which give so startling and Landorian an individuality to all the characters in his works. "I claim no place in the world of letters," he once wrote to a friend. "I am alone, and will be alone so long as I live, and after." It is his truest epitaph!

"Every man," says King Alfred, "must say what he says and do what he does according to his ability." Landor, above most men, did this, and what must always be placed to his credit, was the fact that the circumstances of his life did not make it imperative that he should have done more than Sidney Smith once said he had succeeded in effect-

not that of Time himself, who dips it in the mist of years, can efface it," once said Landor.

ing himself, *viz.*, doing little harm in the world, and bringing up his children.

To Landor more than to any other writer, when we remember his long career of energetic labour, tormented by the petty squabbles of friends and the unceasing torments of enemies,[1] may be applied these two lines in the last verses of Chaucer,—

> "The wrestling of this world asketh a fall;
> Here is no home, here is but wilderness."

[1] Claire, in his Journal, gives a characteristic, if somewhat unpleasant, picture of Landor among the odd English at Pisa. "Landor, who will not see a single English person, says he is glad the country produces people of worth, but he will have nothing to do with them." But the best commentary on the man's nature is his well-known letter to Lord Normanby.

Charles Dickens,

NOVELIST.

"Chief in thy generation born of men;
Whom English praise acclaimed as English born,
With eyes that matched the world-wide eyes of morn
For gleam of tears or laughter, tenderest then
When thoughts of children warmed their light, or when
Reverence of age with love and labour worn,
Or god-like pity fired with god-like scorn,
Shot through them flame that winged thy swift live pen."
—*Swinburne.*

SOME years ago, M. Zola, in speaking of English literature and English writers, included the name of Charles Dickens among the four or five leaders of prose-fiction, whom he (M. Zola) considered, if not absolutely worthless, at least of no considerable value.

There is to be found, doubtless, this consolation for such a literary holocaust by some particular critics, in the fact that, as Frederick von Schlegel somewhere says, "The approbation of the many

has no greater intrinsic value than that false glitter of intellect, that luscious emptiness of heart, for which it is given in exchange."

But in spite of adverse critics, for there have been others besides M. Zola, and notwithstanding exceptions taken to his manner, his methods and his matter, Dickens remains, if not the first of English novelists, at least the most popular.

We are somewhat tenacious of applying the epithet of "novelist" to the author of "Pickwick," however, for in the strict sense of the word he was not a novelist. "He was a poor story-teller—he was not a great plotter," says Mr. Lang; and this is only too apparent in most of the work he did, in "Martin Chuzzlewit" no less than in "Pickwick." "Our Mutual Friend" and "Great Expectations" show, indeed, an effort not wholly unsuccessful to combine intricacy of plot with their author's peculiar genius for character sketching; but particularly in Dickens' earlier work, all such attempts are sadly to seek. It is for this reason that the small tale he wrote in collaboration with Wilkie Collins[1] has more claim to be considered in the light of a novel, according to strict rules, than any of the larger works which emanated from his pen alone; for no greater English master of plot and

[1] "No Thoroughfare."

sensation has lived than the author of "The Moonstone."

But Dickens has been accused of other delinquencies besides that of being defective in the more important attributes of the novelist proper. He is called vulgar; he is said never to have succeeded in drawing a lady or a gentleman; he is attacked for want of true pathos, of being, in other words, a maudlin sentimentalist.

Nowadays, it seems to have become an accepted proposition, that anything to do with the lowest classes is necessarily vulgar, for which reason "Oliver Twist" is attacked on this head with more asperity than "David Copperfield," or "Bleak House." Nothing is so absurd. Vulgarity, using the word in its more extended signification, has its home almost entirely among the middle classes, more particularly the higher middle class, and often among those of a still more elevated standing. To pretend to be what one is not, to ape one's betters, to be ashamed of one's poorer relations, in short all the forms of snobbery which are nowadays so rampant, really form a vulgarity of the worst and most virulent type.

Now there is no instance on record of a writer of fiction who set himself more sturdily to show up the falsity and baseness of such conduct, with the

exception of Thackeray, than Dickens. It is therefore absurd on the face of it to accuse him of harbouring that which he attempted to destroy.

Those who accuse him of failing ignobly, when he attempted to draw the portrait of a lady or a gentleman, are either those who have no real acquaintance with his works, or those (and the class is a much more numerous one) who consider that much wealth and a title constitute the requirements necessary to ensure their owners being enrolled among this privileged class. Who is there that dares assert that the Agnes of "David Copperfield" is not a lady, or the Esther of "Bleak House," or the Florence of "Dombey and Son," or "Little Dorrit"?

Do those who say he never succeeded in drawing the portrait of a gentleman, forget Traddles, who, from the moment he shouts out, "Shame, Steerforth," in school, to when he assures Copperfield, over a luncheon table crowded with everything but what ought to be there, from Dora's guitar case to Jip's pagoda, that he has "oceans of room, I assure you, oceans," is never anything else? Do they fail to remember the generous self-devotion of Sidney Carton, or the lovable nature of Mr. Jarndyce?

Then again his power, once so potent, of drawing tears from the eyes of his readers, is said to be de-

creasing. But is that any fault of the novelist? Has the same hand lost its cunning, because it fails to do now what was so easily effected fifty years ago? It is the generation which is at fault; there is no time for sentiment nowadays, and if such a thing is indulged in at all, it surely ought to be managed vicariously. This is the age of Ibsen; *the décadents* have a vogue. Dickens is old-fashioned, and Thackeray *passé*, and the majority of us seem to be coming round to Zola's verdict. But there are still those who cannot read of the death of Dora, or of Sidney Carton on the scaffold, with undimmed eyes. The man who is ashamed to confess to what is called "such weakness," you may depend is not a good man. He is possibly that excellent nineteenth century substitute, "an awfully 'cute fellow."

It is refreshing to find, when these captious ones have been impatiently heard and happily done with, that Dickens' works, especially among the "vulgar" class, still hold a sway as extended as it is unquestioned.

From statistics[1] we find that "Pickwick"[2] is,

[1] Down to the end of the year 1890, Messrs. Chapman & Hall had published and sold 900,000 copies, besides those editions which have been brought out since the expiration of the author's copyright.

[2] The author's son has lovingly and exhaustively told us

beyond all doubt, first in the field. But "Pickwick," much as we love the book, seems to us, as Dickens himself thought, and Forster, a particularly competent judge, with him, "crude and juvenile;" indeed, not a work by which a writer's reputation should stand or fall. Necessarily with the form of its publication, and the peculiarity of its original intention, it is scrappy and disconnected. This was certainly ameliorated towards the end of the work, for which reason the latter half is by far the better, artistically speaking.

It has been designated a comic middle-class epic, and in its delineation of character, wherein to our mind its chief value lies, in forecasting the eventual successes of Dickens in this particular line, it is on occasions unrivalled even by the author himself. We take Sam Weller and Jingle to be two of the finest creations in the language, for neither, often as this has been doubted and denied, is an exaggeration. Pickwick himself is, however, inconsistent, and at the end of the book we hardly take leave of the same individual with whom we started at the commencement. The trial scene is excellent

all there is to be told of the topography of the book in an excellent article which appeared some time since in the *English Illustrated Magazine*.

both in intention and execution; and as lights of lesser magnitude, Buzfuz and Justice Stareleigh are drawn to the life.

The law has received a good many blows from Dickens, but nothing to equal the good-humoured sarcasm which he has brought to bear against it here. The favourite form of brow-beating resorted to at the time, the ridiculous importance attached to written evidence bearing no relation to the case, the affected pathos of Mr. Buzfuz, and the unaffected boredom [1] of Mr. Justice Stareleigh, are all really incidents taken from actual life accentuated by a master-hand. Jingle is epic; there is no other word to describe him; always calm, collected, and insolent; he is a perfect type of the thorough-going scamp who lives by his own wits and the credulity of other people. The first meeting with Sam Weller; the Eatanswill election; Mr. Pickwick on the ice; life at Bath, and the Fleet Prison, are all incidents which rise to the heights of perfect humour or pathos. Dickens had studied these things thoroughly, but no amount of mere knowledge would have been sufficient to inform such circumstances with the certain immortalities which he has given to them.

[1] "With this beautiful peroration Mr. Sergeant Buzfuz sat down, and Mr. Justice Stareleigh woke up."—"*Pickwick.*"

What makes "Pickwick" a book for all time, beyond its mere interest as a collection of tales connected by a running narrative, is its royal fund of humour, its keen observation, its unsullied delight in all that is good and true, and its genial love of fun, its absolute want of all elements of cant and snobbery; and this, too, is what makes it so perfect a picture of its author's own mind and character. In these points it is a great book, and the man who can properly appreciate it will not be the man who is infected with latter-day morality or *fin de siècle* boredom.

It is for these reasons that "Pickwick" is so pre-eminently a book to be picked up at odd moments and dipped into; reasons which make it as difficult to put it down as it is delightful to take it up. With such attributes it will stand in goodly company with gentle "Don Quixote" and witty "Gil Blas," with the Eastern glories of the "Arabian Nights," and the stirring adventures of "Robinson Crusoe," with the humours of "Tristram Shandy" and the satire of Gulliver. But it will ever have an individuality of its own, and it is difficult to properly estimate amongst what sort of books it ought accurately to be classed, for by design it is a quasi-sporting novel, by execution it stands the Iliad of facetiæ.

It would be difficult to say in which of his books Dickens has put his best work. It is possibly, whichever it be, not what most people would consider his finest novel. The most popular, after Pickwick, is, undoubtedly, "David Copperfield," and in many respects justly so. There are pages in it which, either for humour or pathos, have never been equalled. David Copperfield and the Waiter, and the death of Dora are incidents which stand at the remote ends of Dickens' genius; all other scenes and attributes lie between them.

A great crowd of figures comes before us from this book, all endowed with special note from their own individual attributes, or from the quasi-autobiographical interest which surrounds them. There is Mr. Micawber, with his constant expectations of "something turning up," unabated by many disappointments; there is Mrs. Micawber, with her reliance on the genius of her husband; Traddles, with his self-devotion and quaint ways; the brilliant, treacherous Steerforth; the noble-minded, rugged Peggotty; the too-confiding little Emily; the gentle Agnes; Dora, the child-wife, and Mr. Dick, the child-man; Miss Trotwood, honourable and good, but always stiff; Mrs. Steerforth, lonely and infatuated, but always proud; the fierce, passionate Miss Dartle, and the low,

villainous Uriah Heep. All these and many others come before us grouped round the central figure of David Copperfield; and we feel in reading the book that we are perusing the actual life of its author.

What is most surprising about Dickens, and what redounds most to his credit, is the fact that he, who from the very commencement enchanted the world with hardly an effort, should have taken such infinite pains to improve. For there is scarcely an instance of a really great writer who, during the earlier part of his career, was on occasions so unequal to himself, being oftenest worst when he was trying to be most impeccable, and in attempting to accentuate some particular characteristic not unfrequently degenerating into a mere caricaturist. It is for this reason that it is so surprising that he who sketched Dombey should have drawn Sidney Carton and immortalised Pecksniff.

He was, however, so true an artist, that, as Mr. Henley remarks, from writing newspaper English, he went on to become an exemplar. That he practised Millet's dogma—"Dans l'art il faut sa peau," what stands written by him to one who asked for literary advice, will sufficiently show.

"When one is impelled to write this or that, one has still to consider: How much of this will

tell for what I mean? How much of it is my own wild emotion and superfluous energy—how much remains that is truly belonging to this ideal character and these ideal circumstances? It is in the laborious struggle to make this distinction, and in the determination to try for it, that the road to the correction of faults lies." And in another place he describes himself as "in the first stage of a new book, which consists in going round and round the idea, as you see a bird in his cage go about and about his sugar before he touches it."[1]

If Martin Chuzzlewit is the most elaborate of his works, "Our Mutual Friend" is, to our mind, undoubtedly the best. The book, like all human work, has its faults. People will consider the motives and action of Mr. Boffin, if not actually impossible, still sufficiently improbable. We may be of opinion, too, that the Dolls' Dressmaker, by design a charming character, is by execution rather a lower middle-class idyll than an actual being. Fledgeby is over-drawn, and Twemlow inconsistent. But then what are these defects when contrasted with the unbending majesty of Mrs. Wilfer, or the excellent portrait, with its lights and shadows so skilfully managed, of her daughter Bella; with the

[1] See Mr. Henley's "Views and Reviews," the best book of literary criticism that has been published for many years.

lovable Mrs. Boffin or the patient Riah; above all with Eugene Wrayburn and Bradley Headstone?

The characterisation of the Lammles is perfect, though we are not quite sure whether it is not the man we should have expected to show signs of repentance instead of the woman. For if a woman is once thoroughly steeped in vice, she is ever more consistent in it than a man.

All the circumstances attendant on the river life are so marvellously life-like, that had nothing else survived from his pen, these scenes would have been sufficient to show the wonderful power of observation which Dickens possessed in an almost superhuman degree, and which make the immortal line of Terence probably more true of him than of any writer who has ever lived.

"Martin Chuzzlewit," a book, by the by, with which he took more pains than with any of his other work, which with Dickens is implying more than mere words can express, is on occasions better than anything in "Our Mutual Friend," but is not so consistently good. His tendency to caricature often gets the bit between its teeth and bolts. But with such a masterpiece as Jonas Chuzzlewit, with such immortals as Pecksniff (the nineteenth century Tartuffe), and Mrs. Gamp, no

one could have held the reins so gently or more firmly.

For mere word-painting, the earlier part of the second chapter is equal to anything its author has done in this direction, and the "leaves" in Martin Chuzzlewit forms a companion picture to the "footsteps" in "A Tale of Two Cities." Indeed, this power of what may not inaptly be termed typifying inanimate objects, is one of Dickens' most unique attributes. More or less he makes use of it in all his works, and in the "Christmas Books" one comes upon it again and again.

In nearly everything Dickens wrote he set himself to bring into ridicule, and so to get done away with (for nothing brings about reform like ridicule), the defects which were so characteristic of most public business in his time, and which is not wholly unknown in our own days.

Thus in "Bleak House" he attacked the Law, and showed in the person of Miss Flite what its delays would do, and in the character of Richard, what its contact could cause. In "Little Dorrit" it is the "Circumlocution office" run by the Tite-Barnacles, and the "Marshalsea" with its "father" and its "little domestic advantages." In "Hard Times" it is the "strikes," with the popular crav-

ing for "facts" on the part of the Gradgrinds of the time.[1]

The works which do not affect to touch on these social evils, are nevertheless engaged in noting the failings of particular individuals, so that we may call pride the keynote of "Dombey and Son"; crime that of "Oliver Twist"; hypocrisy of "Martin Chuzzlewit," and meanness of "A Christmas Carol."

But in spite of these characteristics, hardly any works of fiction hide so artistically the fact that they are written for a purpose. Dickens rarely, if ever, breaks off his narrative to moralise like Thackeray, nor is he akin to George Eliot, who seems rather to break off her moralising to continue her narrative. We occasionally come across such aphorisms as this in "Great Expectations": "Throughout life, our worst weaknesses and meannesses are usually committed for the sake of the people whom we most despise," which sounds like one of La Rochefoucauld's maxims before revision; but this is seldom the case, the tale itself being held sufficient, as it invariably is, to point out social abuses or private weaknesses.

Dickens looked upon the novel, as Molière did the drama, as a lay-pulpit from which all sham

[1] The influence of Carlyle, to whom this book was dedicated, is plainly visible.

and falsity ought to be denounced and ridiculed, and he is probably the only writer, with the exception of Thackeray, who, in this respect, made as equally potent an instrument of the novel as the great Frenchman did of the stage.

"A Tale of Two Cities" is the only one of Dickens' books which seems to make everything subordinate to the continued interest of the story; probably for which reason it is with many people his most popular work. It abounds in wonderful delineation of human character, and in marvellous pictures of word-painting, to which no other period in the world's history has given an equal opportunity. The chapter entitled "Echoing Footsteps" is an instance of Dickens' power of what we have before called typifying inanimate objects; the footsteps which are heard echoing round the corner where the Doctor lived, bringing back to Lucie the whole of her young life.

Tremendous that scene where Madame Défarge is brought face to face with Miss Pross, "a Briton and desperate," as she herself tells the Frenchwomen; epic, almost, that struggle, quite a typical struggle, which puts an effectual end to the knitting.

In the 22nd chapter of the second book there is a description of the Paris mob during the first days

of the Revolution, equal in word-painting to anything in Carlyle's great work, that "wonderful book," as Dickens called it; and few things in fiction approach the last scene of all, where Sidney Carton stands upon the scaffold with his young comrade's hand in his, while she timidly asks him whether the Republic is really doing good, and whether she will have to wait long on that distant shore for her friend and cousin. Holy that last kiss, while the knitting women count "twenty-two"! And then—"The murmuring of many voices, the upturning of many faces, the pressing on of many footsteps in the outskirts of the crowd, so that it swells forward in a mass, like one great heave of water, all flashes away. Twenty-three." It is like the fall of the guillotine's axe itself—that "twenty-three"; it cuts short the sentence in a way that is quite typical of that which cut short so many lives. The whole scene is "too deep for tears."

Throughout the master's works we see the same hatred of sham and cant, the same pity for poverty and oppression, the same noble endeavour to do his utmost to lighten the burdens of the poor by making them a bye-word and a scandal. "Un honnête homme que la vue des iniquités humaines faisait bondir," as a writer in the *Figaro* (of April, 1886), once described him. In the man himself,

what we find of kindly generosity, of large-heartedness, of tender sympathy, of joyous good-humour, of inexhaustible fun and unostentatious simplicity, is recorded by those who knew him best and loved him most. Sala and James Payne, Rimmer and Ward, Langton[1] and Dolby, have all told us how the more intimate the association the more lovable he became; and Thackeray has paid to him in the "Four Georges" one of the noblest tributes which a writer can pay to a brother author who is being set in continual opposition to him. But, above all, it is in Forster's "Life," and in Dickens' own letters and speeches, that the true features of the man are best revealed.

With less sterling qualities, few men could have come through the ordeal of applause and adulation which left Dickens unsullied. Like all pre-eminent men, he was self-made; but equally like every true

[1] It is sufficient to glance through Mr. Langton's book on Dickens' childhood, to learn how large an autobiographical debt is due to nearly all his works. These references, Mr. Langton, with a loving appreciation and painstaking care, which is quite phenomenal, has gathered together in his interesting volume. And although many will doubt the utility or advantage of searching too curiously into the exact position Dickens occupied when at school, together with minute investigations into other matters hardly less trivial, yet no one will question the sincerity of the intention or the success of the result.

leader, he was by birth and nature a gentleman. He was not a snob as Thackeray was, since he was not always imagining himself one. He was florid in his tastes, and sometimes flashy in his dress, as he often was in his style; but it was the period in which much jewellery and obtrusive cravats were in vogue, in literature as well as in social life. But everything in his outward appearance became, we are told, subservient to the power of his eyes. "Eyes," says one who knew him, "of the bluest blue; eyes which danced and sparkled with sunniest merriment and yet which quickly softened into serious sympathy; eyes which were brilliant and searching, and seemed always to be kindly, though keenly, reading the person to whom he was talking, yet which never hardened into sternness; eyes in which especially you could discern all the humanity and humour, the noble intellectual possibilities and the manly tenderness of their possessor."

His extraordinary sense of the ludicrous, his remarkable power of imitation, and his keenness of observation he inherited, together with much of his personal beauty, from his mother; and the likeness between her and Mrs. Nickleby is not quite accurate in its implication. Probably, too, Mr. Micawber, for whom Dickens' father is popularly

supposed to have been the model, is made up from some exaggerations of slight peculiarities which the observant Dickens had noticed in the paternal mind and manner.[1]

It is always unfair to assume that Dickens modelled his characters from any particular individuals; he simply noted some salient characteristic in a person, and from an accentuated form of this, built up his character. "Je reprends mon bien où je le trouve," he might have said with Molière, with whom he has so much akin that he may not inaccurately be termed the Molière of prose-fiction.

His method of working was like the man himself, earnest and diligent. "I get up at seven," he says, writing to a friend, "have a cold bath before breakfast, and then blaze away until three o'clock or so, when I usually knock off for the day."

What pains he took in alteration and correction is attested by the manuscripts, written in his inevitable blue ink, and now resting peacefully, their work being done, in the South Kensington

[1] He is spoken of as having been "a fellow of infinite humour, chatty, lively, and agreeable; capable to have imparted to his son Charles materials for some of the characteristic local sketches of men and manners, so graphically hit off in the early chapters of 'Pickwick.'"

Museum. Not only in the manuscripts, however, was the work of revising largely resorted to, but the first proofs were also much and carefully corrected, and in some cases largely augmented; and in this connection we are reminded that Mr. Dick's trouble about the head of Charles I. was an after-thought, and that in the first instance he was in a state of perpetual agitation anent "the bull in the china shop."

Dickens, like Thackeray, died in the fulness of his powers, and in harness to the last; and the "Mystery of Edwin Drood" has a double significance, for it remains but a fragment, an unsolvable mystery in spite of the many ill-advised attempts to work out the plot.

We have seen the room in which Dickens was struck down but two hours after he had written the last page in the little chalet at the end of the Gads Hill garden; and there seemed to us no small analogy between his desire to get back to his beloved home, on the occasion of his assisting at some theatricals at Lady Freake's only a week before his death, and that wild longing of Sir Walter Scott to reach, before he died, his cherished Abbotsford.

Mr. Percy Fitzgerald, in a recent lecture on Dickens, gives what seems to us one of the most

characteristic sketches of his personal appearance yet published.

"The first time I met him," says Mr. Fitzgerald, "was at a railway station; he was standing at the open carriage door, reading his paper, quite careless or unconscious of the many eyes that were bent on him. He wore a little round hat, set rather jauntily on one side, over a little curl, and a light shooting-suit. His face seemed weather-beaten and a good deal worn, like a seaman's. But a most expressive face it was. Every line and muscle seemed to do humorous duty. You saw the glimmer of the anticipated jest working among the very creases of his forehead; it then twinkled in his brilliant eyes, and crept down to his finely-cut nostrils, which quivered sensitively; while under his moustache, in the recesses at the corners of his mouth, there lurked a whole crowd of mirth-compelling fancies, crumpling up the skin in folds from the enjoyment. Thus from his whole face there flashed a general halo of mirth. Add to this a cheery voice, with hearty bursts of, 'Lord bless you, no!' or, 'Bless you, yes, to be sure!' which imparted a genuineness to all that he said. He was, in truth, a delightful creature, one of those picturesque, natural, interesting figures of which only half a dozen at most appear in a generation."

In 1853, on his return to England from America, Dickens gave his first public readings in Birmingham. To venture on this latter nineteenth century product, the giving of readings or lectures, was determined on after some misgivings of his own, and assurances from his friend, Forster, that the thing was *infra dig.*[1]

Dickens was, however, just suited for the work. Without a trace of nervousness, as he himself has told us, eminently qualified by his theatrical proclivities to act the gin-soddened Sarah Gamp or the murderous Bill Sikes, the gentle Bob Cratchit or the bombastic Buzfuz, his efforts were crowned by the most unquestionable success, and the lectures were probably the most remunerative of anything undertaken in this direction. He is calculated to have received over £90,000 for the delivery of them in England and America. Here is what he himself says of them in a letter :—" We have done exceedingly well since we have been out, with this remarkable and pleasant incident, that whatever I read twice, the turn-away is invariably on the second occasion. They don't quite understand beforehand what it is, I think, and expect a man

[1] "His public readings, which were a *pitiful pursuit* after all, were, in fact, acting, and very good acting too."—*Carlyle's "Conversations with Duffy."*

to be sitting down in some corner, droning away like a mild bagpipe. In that large room at Clifton, for instance, the people were perfectly taken off their legs by 'The Chimes,'—started—looked at each other—started again—looked at me—and then burst into a storm of applause. I think the best audiences I have yet had were at Exeter and Plymouth. At Exeter, the best I have ever seen; at Plymouth I read three times, twice in one day. A better morning audience for 'Little Dombey' could not be. And the 'Boots,' at night, was a shout all through. I cannot deny that I shall be heartily glad when it is all over, and that I miss the thoughtfulness of my quiet room and desk. But perhaps it is best for me not to have it just now, and to wear and toss my storm away—or as much of it as will ever calm down while the water rolls—in this restless manner."

The hint about longing for the quiet of his own desk had not been thrown out without some premonitions of fatigue incident on such unwonted exertions, and there is little doubt but that the immense pecuniary remuneration, and the universal applause of two continents, was purchased at the sacrifice of Dickens' health and inclination.

In closing this paper, we take leave of the author of "David Copperfield" with something

more than regret. Personally we regard Dickens as one of the truest of men; one in whom we hail a hatred of all kinds of affectation and cant; one whose works were never sullied by prurient thought or unclean suggestion.

It seems, unfortunately, no less characteristic of the present times that the sexual-problem novel should have a vogue, than that there should be found those who think Dickens "vulgar," and Thackeray "tiresome." As there is probably not a writer living, at least in England, who approaches the one for humour, or the other for pathos, the critical acumen, if these detractors ever possessed it, has probably got jaded and rusty from long disuse, and it would be more charitable, if it were possible, to suppose that those who say they cannot read Dickens are probably those who have never been taught to read at all.

THE PATHOS OF DICKENS.

A NOTE.

It has become the fashion nowadays for struggling mediocrity to attempt a kind of relative advancement by pulling to pieces the hitherto accepted reputations of great writers. In this experimental overthrowal of our idols, Dickens has been one of the first to be attacked. So hard is it, however, to do away with an old affection, when it has as deep a root as that which the genius of Dickens struck in the hearts of his readers, that it has been found difficult to attack him advantageously, except in some particular phase of his work; so his pathos, or rather, as his detractors say, his want of it, has furnished the occasion.

Nowadays, the emotional in literature has become so confounded with the sentimental, that critics have been prone to mistake an exaggeration of the one for an insufficiently vigorous rendering of the other. Sentimentalism reached an epic height in

Werther, and has been declining ever since, luckily perhaps for omnivorous novel-readers, until it has merged its individuality in terrorism, and has raised to itself a power which dominates the book-stalls. It is busied chiefly with the lachrymose youths who are perpetually in love, or the sighing maidens who are ever on the verge of suicide and bad poetry. It aims at going straight to the heart, or one should perhaps rather say the eyes, and troubles itself very little about the mind or the intellect. It is, in short, the dissipation of young ladies and the last resource of old maids, and it has, as Mr. Swinburne would phrase it, added a new terror to life.

Although by no means confined to literature, it is in that capacity alone that we speak of its connection with the modern novel here.

The emotional in literature is in reality a very different thing. Its object is, as it may be expressed, to make the soul weep without necessarily suffusing the eyes; it touches the mind through the intellect, almost wholly. In it there is nothing forced or out of place; it is produced by the simplicity of sorrow rather than by the magnificence of mourning. It has no connection with what is generally termed the luxury of woe. We feel it in the death of Colonel Newcome and in the

description of Emma Sedley on the night before Waterloo; we feel it in the "Only a woman's hair" of Swift, and in the "Et tu Brute" of Cæsar.[1]

Here we have simply the death of an old man, just a few words of a wife to her husband, an inscription on a bit of hair, and the last utterance of a dying monarch. This is *all* on the surface; but what a wonderful substratum of finer feeling, of nobler thought, of pity, sorrow, emotion.

Take that, at first sight, cynical cruel line of Swift's—"Only a woman's hair"; but what does this not denote: "only," as Thackeray has told us in words almost as pathetic, "only love, only fidelity, only purity, innocence, beauty; only the tenderest heart in the world stricken and wounded, and passed away now out of reach of pangs of hope deferred, love insulted, and pitiless desertion; only the lock of hair left; and memory and remorse, for the guilty, lonely wretch, shuddering over the grave of his victim."

Mr. Andrew Lang,[2] who generally has such a

[1] The fact of this last being apocryphal does not detract from its pathos.

[2] It is amusing to see the way in which Mr. Lang goes round and round his subject as if unsatisfied at his own cavils, but yet honestly feeling that he ought to raise a

love and reverence for Dickens, accuses him of deliberately saying, as it were, "Now, let us have a good cry," and so declines to shed tears over Little Nell or mourn over Little Dombey; but as it seems to us, this generally acute critic has here mistaken the intention of the master, and imagines him enforcing his lachrymosial dose where in reality there is no such intention at all.

Because the death of Little Nell has made whole myriads of readers weep, are we to believe that Dickens wrote only for this end, and must we come to the conclusion that he who could draw tears from the heart by a few words would have expended pages to do the same thing? Hardly so, for if the pathos of Dickens is to be judged merely by what he writes descriptive of the actions and thoughts of dying persons, we shall find him no greater in this connection than hundreds of other writers who are in other respects not worthy to hold a candle to him.

Beneath his pathos sometimes lies a root of merriment; what more pathetic character than the Dolls' Dressmaker, and who so happy as she? What sadder figure than Florence, yet who so unselfish and contented? What shall be said of Tom Pinch, and

voice against what he considers to be Dickens' false pathos. It is almost pathetic in itself.

are there not incidents in his life, the recital of which bring both laughter and tears to the eyes?[1] And then for particular incidents, what will the cavillers say to that scene where the Peggottys learn of the flight of little Emily, or that tragic ending of the first part of David Copperfield's life —the death of Dora? Who can think of the sorely stricken husband sitting brooding and melancholy over the fire, while the dog moans out its life at his feet, or can picture to himself that solemn figure which announces that Dora is gone—that sobbing, half-incredulous, interrogative "Agnes!" without feeling something like a choking sensation in the throat? Think how Smollett or Richardson would have treated such a scene, and then estimate what emotional power Dickens possessed. Or take the moment of Sidney Carton's death, and repeat again those questions which his companion puts to him!

But, indeed, there are so many instances that might be adduced in this connection that one can, as it were, afford to throw overboard the cases of Little Nell and Little Dombey to satisfy the hyper-

[1] Instances might so easily be multiplied. Let the reconciliation of Dr. Strong to Annie, the love of Little Dorrit, Riah's beautiful unselfish devotion, and the mention of the emigrants in "The American Notes," be remembered.

critical, who seem to have fallen foul of these two characters in particular.

All emotion is so purely relative that the reason why Dickens is said by some people not to succeed in it, is, as it appears to us, because he is so frequently sailing close to it, and consequently he does not get as much contrast on it as other writers who are invariably more cynical or more commonplace.

One of Dickens' biographers, after noticing and meeting in the fullest way the cavillings of critics and others with regard to this writer's want of pathos, says, "Dickens, working at his best, was one of the greatest masters of pathos who ever lived," and he adds, "My conclusion is that, though he failed with Little Nell, yet he succeeded elsewhere, and superbly." And this is the verdict of no partial judge, for what in other connections he has said of Dickens proves that this judgment is formed after mature consideration and with the fullest knowledge of the subject.

But allowing that the adverse critics are mistaken, how comes it that this class should have arisen at all? How does it happen that the character that once, we are told, drew tears from Jeffrey, should now well-nigh create ridicule in those even who are professed admirers of the author? It is possibly the times which are "out of

joint." Nowadays it is difficult for emotion to be taken seriously; not that we are not as serious as hitherto, but we try to disguise the fact, and like those miserable consumptives, while feeling the pangs of approaching death, we would avoid all mention of the matter and think that in deceiving ourselves we are throwing dust in the eyes of our fellows.

The age has, in fact, become too commercial for much lingering over the finer feelings, and we are ever prone to disallow the accuracy of that which we are unable to understand or appreciate. It has, too, become the age of "'odious' comparisons." If a man fails in some particular, we do not say he falls short of *our* private conception of the matter, or that he is many degrees below the accepted standard; we say he is not so good as "So-and-So," when in reality "So-and-So" may only be the ideal of ourselves, and perhaps of the majority of people, which is often tantamount to saying that he is the wrong ideal. So many poets have suffered injustice from a purely irrelevant comparison with Shakespeare and Goethe; so many musicians have had their fame diminished by the superlative genius of Beethoven and Bach; so many painters have fallen short when brought into juxta-position to the pre-eminence of Michael Angelo and

Raphael, that one would have imagined that those who are fond of judging in this way had been sufficiently taught that it is as impossible to form an ideal for one man out of the work of another as it would be for that man to achieve fame in exactly the same direction, and by exactly the same means as his more or less illustrious contemporary.

It is for this reason that the comparison so often instituted between the relative merits of Dickens' pathos and that of Thackeray is so greatly to be reprehended. There is room for Sidney Carton as well as for Colonel Newcome, there is place for Agnes as there is for Emma; and it is no reason, because Thackeray has written in the "Four Georges," as well as in "Vanity Fair" and "The Newcomes," some of the most pathetic lines that have ever come from a novelist's pen, that we should refuse to see the merits of what Dickens, in "David Copperfield" and in the "Tale of Two Cities," has done in the same direction.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge,

POET.

"To only have conceived,
Planned your great works, apart from progress,
Surpasses little works achieved!"

—*Browning.*

If we except Shakespeare, there is hardly another individual in the ranks of English literature who can, in any appreciable way, be placed in the foremost position as a man of pure genius. We have had great poets like Milton and Wordsworth; we have had pre-eminent prose-writers like De Quincey and Thackeray; but the former have been nothing if not poets, the latter little except prose-writers.

In Coleridge we come face to face with one who was nearer Shakespeare than any other that can be named; the formation of whose mind was more complex, and the phases of whose genius were more various than any other writer's in the whole field of English letters.

Had Coleridge's claim to this great position

rested solely on what he has done for poetry, these claims might with justice be disallowed, and his right to rank next the greatest genius we have ever possessed might with every show of reason be questioned. This is, however, in no wise the case, but, unfortunately, it is by this phase of his work that he is apt only to be judged. For the general public (we know what Carlyle said of it), he remains a poet, a poet only, and a poet of whom comparatively little is known, for it may be assumed very reasonably that his claims in this direction are based upon one of the three immortal poems he wrote. We mean "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner."

It is certainly not without precedent for a man to be known by one particular effusion, but it is without parallel that a poet should be recognised as such to the extent that Coleridge is by this poem. The general public has to busy itself about so many different matters, that it can hardly be expected to do more than, as it were, skim the productions of its great ones. It is left for individuals to go more deeply into a writer's personality and aims, and it seems to be entirely owing to the amount of interest a man awakens in such particular minds, whether or no he can be said to be largely read or widely appreciated.

Coleridge, except in one or two instances, did not possess this power, or else his possession of it has not been sufficiently recognised.

A poet, to be duly appreciated, must be either purely didactic or seem very obscure. In the first instance he appeals to a large number of people, because he, oftener than not, enunciates the obvious in an agreeable form; in the second place, he interests those who only enjoy those fruits which they have been at infinite pains to gather. Wordsworth may be taken as an example of the former class, Browning of the latter.

Coleridge, on the other hand, was neither didactic nor obscure; in short, he did not provide, in any sense, wares which would be able to give their purchasers, on the one hand, the credit of common sense, or, on the other, that of painstaking industry. Yet, notwithstanding these drawbacks, he is still regarded essentially as a poet; in fact, that particular attribute, concerning which so little comparatively is known, is looked upon as his only claim to fame, and the unappreciated has become the universal. No sadder fate could have befallen greatness.

In the commencement to his "Biographia Literaria," a work which is priceless for its discriminating criticisms on the proper aims and

achievements of poetry, just as the "Aids to Reflection" is quite invaluable for its moral teaching, Coleridge has left us a sort of *apologia* for his manners and his methods, and we are able to estimate how many delinquencies he was at first accused of, by the exhaustive nature of his defence; we are able, too, to judge how adversely that was originally received, which is nowadays often but coldly tolerated. Our author's fate has gone from bad to worse.

When we thus consider the nature of the man himself, what will at once strike us with surprise and admiration is his amazing versatility. To go properly into all the protean changes of his mind, and to accurately estimate all the various phases of his apathetic activity, if one may so term it, we should have to consider him in a hundred characters, as journalist, poet, critic, metaphysician, logician, preacher, philosopher, and discourser.[1] He assumed all these characters, but to say he filled

[1] "Let the dullest clod that ever vegetated, provided only he be alive and hears, be shut up in a room with Coleridge, or in a wood, and subjected for a few minutes to the ethereal influence of that wonderful man's monologue, and he will begin to believe himself a poet."—*Christopher North*, "*Essays*." Coleridge was, above all other men, a discourser; a good conversationalist he could hardly be termed, for the secret of great conversational power is to possess the faculty of listening as well as of talking.

them would be misleading. It is for this reason that his contemporaries, and the literary world for many years after his death considered him to be a so much greater man than is the case with the general public to-day, for it judged him by what it thought he could do, rather than by what he did.

Probably it assumed too much in that direction, as partisanship is often inclined to do; but, on the other hand, the revulsion of public feeling has brought with it a less just estimate still, and from those who thought Coleridge could do all things well, to those who doubt if he really could do any pre-eminently, has been but a step.

Few things can be so detrimental to a man's final position in the Valhalla of Literature as an exaggerated reputation during his life-time, and there is hardly an individual of the first rank on record who has not achieved fame gradually and against strenuous opposition.

To detect the failings of great men is the delight of dunces, and there is nothing more absurd and pathetic than the sight of loathsome maggots eating their way into the tawny coat of a dead lion. The exaggerated fame of a man has, however, another class of foes to fight against; those, indeed, who attack his reputation because it has been lauded by his contemporaries, and for no other reason. A

third and more dangerous class of enemies are those who seek to gain a reputation for themselves by pulling to pieces the renown of a great man; and this has become as sure a way of attracting public notice as the seeking to gain an adventitious glory by bringing into notice and making ridiculous by hyperbolic praise some third or fourth-rate poet. Nothing is too high or too low for the literary interviewer, nothing too obvious or too sacred.

That Coleridge's fame, however, as a man of pre-eminent genius should not have received that general recognition, which is undoubtedly its due does not arise solely from a want of proper appreciation of his aims or productions; it happens, in a large measure, from the peculiar constitution of the man himself. Those who are in any way acquainted with his life will not have failed to recognise how much sterling metal lay deep in the recesses of his mind unused and even unsearched for.

It has been the misfortune of many great men to combine with the highest natural gifts a quite extraordinary feebleness of will for making use of these gifts, so that had this more material power existed in any measureable extent with the more spiritual, many of those who have shown great promise, but have perpetrated little, might have

been classed among the great ones of the world. To some extent this may be predicated of Coleridge. In him there seemed, more than in any other on record, to be combined the most god-given natural genius with the most mortal incapacity for making any appreciable use of it. By what fragmentary work he has left, however, in all branches of literature and natural science, we are sufficiently able to gauge the bounds of his capacity of mind and intellect; those, too, who knew him personally have attested the vast extent of his genius.

Emerson, who, when in this country, appears to have gone about interviewing the chief celebrities, and drawing conclusions from a single visit, whether propitious or no, has given us a somewhat unsatisfactory although a not wholly uncharacteristic account of Coleridge; but if we would judge accurately of the man himself out of the mouths of his contemporaries, it is to such men as Wordsworth and Lamb and De Quincey that we must go, and we shall at once see in what high estimation and love those who were most capable of understanding him held the author of "Kubla Khan."

Did we receive with full belief Goethe's somewhat arbitrary and misleading dictum, that "genius is the art of taking infinite pains," we should be com-

pelled to reluctantly allow that Coleridge could not, under such circumstances, be considered a man of genius. But what Goethe probably means to infer is that *talent* is the art of taking infinite pains, a very different conclusion. For genius is a god-given possession which neither man's vain endeavour can assume, nor human feebleness of will entirely take away.[1]

But it is rather Coleridge's possession of the divine gift of this genius that we would insist on, than the use which he made of it; for looked upon in this latter aspect, he remains, when all is said and done, the most disappointing of all truly great men.

It must by no means be supposed that by what we have here said, we wish to infer that Coleridge has not done much in each and every realm of thought in which he busied himself. What we would urge on is that what he has done, although it might stand for the life-long labour of an ordinary individual, is in his case but a tithe of what he might and ought to have done, and that he has been judged accordingly.

[1] Coleridge has himself thus expressed the difference. "*Talent*, lying in the understanding, is often inherited; genius, being the action of reason and imagination, rarely or never."

To most men it is given to gain a name by hard work; they have to hew out of the solid block of their life labour, a reputation. From Coleridge hardly such an effort was necessary, and that what comes to most people by dint of concentration of energy, came to him without an effort in dreams and such like forms of divine *afflatus*, is attested by the history of "Kubla Khan." Yet it happened that an entire lack of moral strength rendered him too enervated to turn such propitious circumstances to an account at once worthy of their origin and of himself. "All other men I have met," says Southey, somewhere, "are mere children to him, and yet all is palsied by a total want of moral strength."

The poetry of Coleridge is mainly so fragmentary that it is difficult, if we have not adequately estimated the character of the man, to believe that it is the production of one in whom the logical sequence of thought was greater than in almost any other individual who has ever lived.

Knowing what we do of his life and of the reasons which tended so surely to emasculate his intellect, we can hardly be surprised at the unsatisfactory result, and we gaze in awe on the terrible picture of one phase of a great mind, fated to continually war against the weaker half of itself, like

the Œdipus of the Greek poet continually fighting against inexorable fate.

The general public, as we commenced by saying, has not done justice to the many-sided greatness of Coleridge's intellect, in fact there are few men of equal consequence who have suffered so much in this respect; on the other hand, not many individuals with equal gifts, have had those gifts so liberally acknowledged by the few contemporary eminent men who were, after all, the most adequate and most trustworthy judges in such matters. This was probably, however, not a salutary circumstance for his renown. Enthusiastic friends are often as great a drag on a man's reputation, as poor relations are on his purse. To insist to the public with sledge-hammer like persistence, that a man who is living in their midst, a man moreover who seems to have more than an ordinary share of human frailty, possesses a superlative intellect, is likely to awaken an opposition that otherwise had slept peaceably and harmlessly. It is difficult to have even an immortal, and such his friends insisted Coleridge was, thrust, as the common phrase has it, down our throats; we are apt to regard him much as schoolboys do the prig who is always being held up by the master. The large schoolroom of the world is in no way more tolerant than

the pedagogue's class-room; and in very opposition to an otherwise harmless individual, we are apt to throw in the faces of his eulogisers, the fact that though he may be great at Greek hexameters, yet he is less than the worst in the cricket-field or the gymnasium. Coleridge's admirers were, and are, still met in this way, and although it is allowed that he may have been a good poet and a great metaphysician (which it is hinted others have been too), yet, we are reminded, he was entirely lacking in moral force, and, as it were, became the voluptuary of literature (which others have not).

It happened that the present writer was on a certain occasion at a dinner-party, when the conversation happened to turn on the author of "Kubla Khan." He (the writer) dropped a remark "in his silly South-British way," as Lamb has it, to the effect that he considered Coleridge *per se* one of the greatest of English intellects, making a reservation, if he remembers aright, in favour of Shakespeare, Bacon and Newton; when he was confronted by no fewer than three individuals, who not only declined to allow that Coleridge was a pre-eminently great man at all, but (somewhat contradicting themselves after the manner of most intolerant persons) asserted that Byron had a much greater mind.

The anecdote serves to illustrate the position held by the majority of people with regard to the subject of this chapter.

It is a question whether the man who does few things well and very little ill, is a greater man intellectually than he who does many things well and very much badly; but the supporters of Lord Byron will have little doubt about it, and they will be apt to condone much of the matter of "Don Juan" for the sake of the ingenuity of its rhymes.

Considering what of poetical work Coleridge left behind him, we cannot conscientiously say that his industry was great, but we may on the other hand console ourselves in the conclusion that little of it was worthless. Not that he, like many men who have left behind them a small legacy after a long life's work, was always polishing and correcting, for had this been the case, he might have been termed industrious in the truest sense of the word. No; what he did seems to have been done because, as it were, he could not help perpetrating it. Some inner voice, like the *Dæmon* of Socrates, arose within him, and he appears merely to have transcribed what it told him. How else can we account for the mystic beauties of "Christabel," or the Oriental splendour of "Kubla Khan"?

It is not difficult to understand how impossible a man the world found Coleridge to be; nor is it to be wondered at that it refused to take at the valuation of his friends, a being who added to such a poetic temperament, irregularity in fulfilling duties, absence of mind, and infirmity of purpose.

It must not, however, be assumed that because the world did not share the individual opinions held with regard to Coleridge, that it refused to see any merit in his intentions, or tried to boycott his works. On the contrary, the public has received him with open arms as a poet, even as a great poet, but it is with open arms, not on bended knee. He has been hailed as Southey has, or Campbell, or Thomson; he has not been regarded as the pre-eminent man he so undoubtedly was.

In the completeness of his genius and the breadth of his intellect, Coleridge approaches nearer, and is more akin to, Goethe than any other individual we can name.[1] Where, however, he fell short of the immortal German, was in lacking the power to concentrate his energies, or to thoroughly work out the immense resources of

[1] De Quincey, in an essay on Herder, says the best idea he can give of him is by calling him the "German Coleridge," having the same all-grasping erudition, the same spirit of universal research, the same disfiguring superficiality and inaccuracy, the same undeterminateness of object, etc.

his mind. What he did, although exquisite of its kind, was not done continuously or with any settled purpose, but was created spasmodically, and to a certain extent aimlessly. Everything Goethe did, on the other hand, even if we are to believe his own words, his love affairs, was all undertaken for the final definite object of self-education and self-repression; no other man of genius has so lived by rule, and it has thus come to be an almost universally accepted maxim, that irregularity is a sign of genius and eccentricity a form of divine *afflatus*. There is, of course, some truth in this, for it seldom happens that a really great man can combine the attributes of genius with the energetic business-like habits of a commercial man. Coleridge certainly did not do this, and more than one contemporary has left on record that he who discoursed

> "Of providence, free knowledge, will and fate,
> Fixed fate, free will, free knowledge absolute,
> And found no end in wandering mazes lost,"

was he alone who ever fulfilled their estimate of a man of genius.

If we turn from the man himself to what he has done in the realms of poetry, we shall find this same want of continuity; we shall perceive that

what are called his poetical works are in reality fragments—fragments, indeed, as noble as the torso of the Venus of Milo, and we shall catch in them glimpses of their author's mind, a ruin glorious as the moonlit Coliseum.

"The Ancient Mariner" is one of the most dramatic songs in our language, for which reason probably it has been offered up, together with one or two other almost equally fine productions, as a sacrifice to the commonplace. There is something tremendous about a tale which is so absorbing in its interest, so gruesome in its details, so unearthly in its effect, that it can hold three wedding-guests spell-bound and immovable, within hearing of the festival's din; there is something uncanny about the teller of the tale, whose wild glittering eyes seem to cast such a spell on his listeners.[1] But this is merely the *raison d'être* of the story, and

[1] *The Monthly Review* for May, 1799, thus speaks of "The Ancient Mariner": "'The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere,' in imitation of the *style* as well as of the spirit of the elder poets, is the strangest story of a cock and bull that we ever saw on paper; yet, though it seems a rhapsody of unintelligible wildness and incoherence (of which we do not perceive the drift, unless the joke lies in depriving the wedding guest of his share of the feast), there are in it poetical touches of an exquisite kind!" The same *Review* for January, 1817, after hacking "Christabel" to pieces, speaks of "Kubla Khan"

when we come to the manner in which Coleridge has clothed these ideas with his own immortal poesy, criticism is mute, and captiousness stands abashed.

The few lines that tell of the skeleton ship with its fearful freight of the spectre-woman and Death, how they play for life, and she, the Mother of all sin, throws the dice and wins, are so perfect in their design and execution, that we doubt if there are many things in poetic literature to equal them. And to this there is that marvellously beautiful companion picture of the "Seraph Band."

> "This seraph band each waved his hand;
> It was a heavenly sight!
> They stood as signals to the land,
> Each one a lonely light;
>
> "This seraph band each waved his hand,
> No voice did they impart—
> No voice; but oh! *the silence sank*
> *Like music on my heart.*"

Is not that, in the words we have italicised, a lovely figure? It is really beyond the reach of criticism.

It is, however, in that wonderful relic of a vast

as a poem "below criticism." And it was writers of such reviews as this who set themselves up as judges of our literature!

mind, wrecked by the weight of its own personality, "Kubla Khan," that Coleridge's genius is best pictured. The poem has a curious resemblance to its creator. It breathes the same marvellous melody of rhythm with which he was informed, it has the same depth of sentiment and beauty of expression; but it is, like the intellect which begot it, incomplete.

One half of Coleridge's mind seems to have been Oriental and the other half German; but the Eastern held the more dominant sway, and when we read of Xanadu and its sacred river, our mind reverts to the Oriental glories of the "Arabian Nights" and the good Haroun Alraschid, magnificent in his simplicity.

What mind that was not steeped in such Eastern imagery could have imagined that enchanted bird with

> "His eyes of fire, his beak of gold,
> All else of amethyst!"

or could have dreamed of seeing with "cheek aslant,"

> ". . . . . rivers flow of gold
> 'Twixt crimson banks."

To Germany, as we have said, we are indebted for the matter, to the East for the manner of his

poems, but transcending both influences rises in majestic glory the magnificence of his own genius, making the philosophy of the one seem deeper and the beauty of the other greater; for the combination of love and intellect is alone capable of engendering the divinest poetry.

In the first of the Introductory Aphorisms to the "Aids to Reflection," Coleridge says, "In Philosophy equally as in Poetry, it is the highest and most useful prerogative of genius to produce the strongest impressions of novelty, while it rescues admitted truths from the neglect caused by the very circumstance of their universal admission." In these words we have in the shortest of epitomes, what their author attempted himself to put into practice both as a Poet, a Logician, and a Metaphysician.

By nature the facets of his mind were already cut; by depth of observation and by diligence of study he had himself polished them to an extraordinary degree, but the jewel was so badly set that much of the surrounding metal hid its natural glories, and stones of lesser beauty and of smaller worth have shone more brightly because more carefully adjusted.

Everything in poetry that Coleridge wrote seems to have been derived from *direct* inspiration, and

when this inspiration stopped the poem was discontinued. Thus it is that he has left so little that is not able to be placed in the first rank. He is, in this connection, as he is in his poetical capacity, the direct antithesis of Pope, and indeed of all those who have made their verse subservient to their will.

"Christabel," which, with the "Ancient Mariner" and "Kubla Khan," constitutes his chief claim to poetical fame, as far as the general public is concerned, is but a fragment; because when he had finished what he has left us of it, the divine inspiration suddenly deserted him; and the poet himself used to say that should ever the divine ray recur to him, he would attempt the completion of the poem. He has even left a sketch of how he intended, under these happy circumstances, to finish the work. It will not surprise those who have read what we have had to say of the man and his character to learn that not only was it never completed, but that no effort appears to have been made to lure back the necessary inspiration.

There is no sadder sight in the annals of English literature than that of this great genius wearing itself out in fragmentary effusions, as if it found nothing in this world worthy the concentration of its vast energies; as if, believing that its very be-

ginnings were of more worth than most men's entire productions, it was content in the conclusion.

"Ah! piteous sight it was to see this man
When he came back to us, a withered flower!
Or, like a sinful creature, pale and wan,
Down would he sit, and, without strength or power,
Look at the common grass from hour to hour;
And oftentimes, how long I fear to say,
When apple-trees in blossom made a bower,
Retired in that sunshiny shade he lay,
And, like a naked Indian, slept himself away."

No life of Coleridge, in the proper sense of the word, exists.[1] Material does not lack, for even if we disregard the autobiographical nature in which most of his prose work is clothed, his collected "Table Talk" and the *Biographia Literaria*, we have notices of him from the hands of all the eminent men who were his contemporaries, and all of whom knew the man, and loved him.

All that seething turmoil of passions and personalities, of which he once formed the central

[1] We do not forget the excellent monographs of the poet by his friend Gillman, or those by Messrs. Trail & Hall Caine, nor the prefatory notice of Mr. Ashe, affixed to his edition of Coleridge's works, as well as the innumerable essays which the genius of the man and his works have given rise to, nor particularly Mr. Dykes Campbell's most excellent biographical memoir.

figure, is stilled. But it will require a brave man to attempt to do justice to the many-sided character of the individual and his writings. It will be necessary to possess something more than mere biographical materials to set forth finally the true aspects of Coleridge as critic, metaphysician, philosopher, logician, poet, and man. And he who will effectually do so will be he who brings to his work the discrimination of a philosopher, the exactitude of a logician, and the love of a poet.

THE END.

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